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SHORT STORIES

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Out of the artist's daydream there stepped suddenly into the brilliant sunlight the only girl he could love, and the girl to whom he had never spoken. *See The Lady of Daisy Dingle.*

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THE LADY OF DAISY DINGLE.

CHAPTER I.

In their cool cycling dresses, their faces ruddy with health, their hair a trifle wind-blown, two girls looked charming as they spun along at a rattling rate.

Julia Mortimer's wilfulness had gained her the sobriquet of "Gipsy;" her delightful personality and the charm of her face and manner made her beloved by all around her, and being his only daughter she was her father's darling.

Cousin Madge was a pretty and clever girl of a more serious turn than Julia, no doubt partly due to the fact that she had been left an orphan in early years.

Her home had been at Locksley Hall since that sorrowful event, and the two girls had grown up together like sisters.

"I am going to have some of that lovely may-blossom, Madge," said Julia, as she slipped off her cycle, and propped it safely against a tree.

Then she scrambled amongst the thick growth of hawthorn trees on the hunt for blossom.

Madge accompanied her, and, peeping through the leafage, they beheld one of the most delightful landscapes their eyes had ever rested upon—a dingle surrounded with trees, and covered with ferns and wild-flower.

On a knoll, busily at work on a canvas around which bees buzzed in journeying from the flowering honeysuckle that hung in festoons at only a few yards distance, a young painter sat upon an artist's stool. He wore a loose tweed cycling dress and a huge wide-awake shaded his head from the sun.

With a sweeping, straw coloured moustache, blonde beard and fine profile, light curls straggling from his sombrero, he looked exceedingly handsome, and he had certainly with an artist's quick eye selected a most picturesque spot for the canvas.

"What do you think of him?" asked Julia.

"He is young and very handsome."

"He is certainly passable, Madge, but I'm going to give him a surprise."

A very gentle "Peek-a-boo!" came from behind the brambles.

The artist turned with a look of amazement. The call was repeated. He laid down his brush.

"Don't do it, Julia," said Madge.

But Gipsy Julia was aroused.

She thrust her head between a growth of honeysuckle, and said, defiantly:

"Yoicks! Tally-ho!"

The artist saw a very beautiful face framed one instant in flowers and greenery, then the girls withdrew in a great hurry, reached their cycles, mounted, and sped homewards at a record pace, Julia carrying a bunch of of may-blossom across her handle-bar.

When the painter reached the road, he saw them far in the dust of the distance. "It is the same face," he said in a dream of amazement, "that has haunted me so long. If it be real, and not a phantom that has come out of the leafage as beautifully and as strangely as the honeysuckle flowers have done, that is the face of the girl—the only girl I shall marry!"

CHAPTER II.

The Artist in Daisy Dingle.

"I think you treated him shamefully, Julia," said Madge.

"I wonder if I did?" the girl asked herself at intervals during the day, and finding no satisfactory answer she put the question to her brother Harry.

"If you were an artist," she said, "and you were painting a landscape hundreds of miles from here, and a roguish girl who happened to be passing put her face through the honeysuckle creepers and shouted 'Tally ho;' would it offend you?"

"It would all depend on the girl's face, if it were a very pretty one——"

"Madge's, for instance."

"That's an excellent idea of yours, Sis; we'll say Madge's. Well in that case I don't think I should be offended very much. At any rate I might easily be persuaded to forgive the intrusion and the audacity."

"You know I studied for the law, Sis," he said. "At least I am supposed to have done so, and I feel as though I had a wig and gown on when you come to me in this way. I won't charge you six-and-eightpence, but who is the artist fellow?"

It was Julia's turn to flush up now.

"I didn't say he really existed, did I? I merely put an ordinary question because it happened to strike me, I suppose."

"I see, a kind of chess problem. Then you're not seriously thinking of poking your head out among the bushes and disturbing the first painter you encounter by a foolish fox-hunting cry."

Julia turned away.

"I'm not going to stand any more of your chaff, Harry," she said.

"That's all right, but don't go, I want to talk about fashion plates and things. You know the visitors will be arriving to-morrow. Now I want to know what you two girls are going to wear. I should say the costumiers have been very busy from the file of bills Dad's got on hand."

"Harry, you are the quintessence of annoyance in some of your moods, and——"

"A jolly good fellow in others."

"Well, I'll give you credit for being good company now and again. Madge will do the same, I believe."

"I suppose I must, Julia."

"Oh, especially on moonlight nights, when——"

"If you go on any further, Sis, I'll ask you more questions about that artist fellow."

"Well I'm not afraid, but we'll cry a truce if you say that you never saw the dressmaking bills."

"I can't say that because you know I really did. It was quite accidental, though. I was turning over Sir Colville's papers, looking for a cheque that he had mislaid at the time. On my word of honour, I did not glance at the total."

"It wouldn't have mattered if you had done so. I shall wear pearl white silk and brocaded silver satin with chiffon frills, and Madge has a delicious tea-gown in heliotrope and green shot silk with ivory lace."

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"I have chosen an exquisite ball dress in cream satin with rare crocus lace; as for Madge she must speak for herself."

"The programme is as varied as the bills," laughed Harry. "I know you'll both look charming, and we're to have a flood of visitors. I have been expecting my old college chum, Lord Eustace Cranleigh, down for one, but Eustace always was a mysterious fellow, and I can't get a scrap of news about him. He's an artist to his finger tips, besides being a capital amateur actor, something of a poet, and a good musician. He delights in rambling about strange countries in all sorts of

A young painter sat upon an artist's stool. He wore a loose tweed cycling suit, and a huge wide-awake shaded his head from the sun.

strange ways, and I dare say you remember that book of his that was the sensation of the season a year ago, 'Through Morocco in disguise.'"

"I read it very eagerly," said Julia, "and I was deeply struck with his personality."

"It was certainly a charming book," said Madge, "and the illustrations were delightful."

"They were all pen and ink drawings of his own. Well, I was out with Eustace in the Mediterranean, as you know, and he promised for certain to spend two or three weeks with me here at Locksley Hall, Lionel accompanying him."

"Will he come?" asked the two girls together.

"That's just a question I can't answer. He's rambled away somewhere incognito, but his whereabouts are unknown, even to his brother. I should not wonder at his turning up, though."

"Do you still believe I acted shamefully to that painter in the wood?"

"Abominably," replied her cousin.

"Well, if I did," the beautiful brunette flashed out, "I'll—I'll tell him I didn't mean to."

"He was very handsome, wasn't he?" Madge said roguishly.

Now Julia had flushed crimson as Madge burst into rippling laughter.

"Tit for tat," she exclaimed, and Julia laughed, too.

* * * * *

The painter sat at his canvas in Daisy Dingle, as the picturesque little spot was called, but he sat idly this time. A day had passed, yet the painting had not progressed.

Having puffed at his briar pipe rather despondingly for some time, he produced a photograph from his pocket-book and gazed at it with a new look in his hazel-brown eyes.

It was the picture of a beautiful young girl, who bore a wonderful resemblance to Julia Mortimer.

"The face is the same," said the painter. "I cannot be mistaken in that. It is impossible. That I should meet her in sunny Devonshire was to be looked for, for where else could you find surroundings so charmingly suited to her delicate beauty. Well, I leave it all in the hands of Fate. Kismet has brought us together again, and, that being so, what shall separate us?"

Out of the artist's daydream there stepped suddenly into the brilliant sunlight the only girl he could love and the girl to whom he had never spoken.

Surely the face and form before him was that of Julia Mortimer, but she wore the ordinary homespun dress of a Devonshire country maiden, and she carried a sprig of fragrant may-blossom in her hand.

CHAPTER III.

AN ARTIST'S MODEL.

THE girl hesitated.

"I beg your pardon," she said.

The painter raised his wide-brimmed hat with a grace that told of high breeding.

"Please do not apologize. I am honoured by your presence, and you know I have no legal tenancy of Daisy Dingle." I only chose it because it is the most delightful and yet the most secluded spot I have found so far in your beautiful country."

"You have certainly chosen a charming spot for your canvas," she said. "I am Devonshire born, so I must thank you for the pretty compliment you have paid to us in words and in colours."

"I should be glad if you would appoint yourself my critic on this occasion," he said. "You know Devonshire so well, that you will see faults that would be less obvious to the ordinary person."

"If the function of a critic is to pick out faults, I am afraid I should make a very indifferent one," she said. "I have nothing but appreciation for your little work of art. Daisy Dingle is deliciously set in oils upon your little canvas."

"I don't think it's worthy of your praise," he said.

"It is worthy of being hung side by side with the best things in the Academy."

"Then you have been to the Academy?"

"That is scarcely possible for a Devonshire village girl," she said equivocally; "but I have read the notices and seen reproductions you know."

"You will pardon me saying that you get very little idea of the real pictures from them."

"But I have seen good pictures, and frankly, I admire yours immensely."

"Then I am more than repaid for having painted it. I had an idea of sending it in, but——"

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"You will do so!"

"No, I shall offer it to you!"

"For what reason, please?"

"Because—you like it."

"And you think I would accept it?"

"I shall be very disappointed if you do not—when it is finished."

"I should not think of doing so."

"But there would be conditions."

"I do not understand you."

"Well, you will forgive me if I say what I mean. I don't believe this picture of Daisy Dingle would ever get into the Academy, but I have one in my mind that would, if you consented to help it on a little."

"You may depend upon that."

"I hardly think so; in fact, I am half-afraid to ask you."

"But you must!"

"Well, when I first saw Daisy Dingle I thought it was an ideal spot—merely as it was then; but I am convinced of my mistake. There must be a figure in the canvas."

"Well?"

"That figure is a girl's, who carries may-blossom, and looks quite captivating enough to overcome the Academy judges, even if the painting scarcely did her justice."

"I think I see what you mean through your compliments. You would like me to pose as a model for your canvas."

"That is a very hard way of putting it. I do not ask the trees and the newly-blossomed hedgerows to pose, neither shall I you. The dingle is very beautiful, and if you will allow me to say so, you, too, are very beautiful. My poor brush would seek to set down your beauty in colour, and to draw around you the beauties of the Devonshire dingle."

"Then you wish to make me the central figure in your canvas?"

"I will not seek to hide that. Crowned with may-blossom I should paint you in the heart of the canvas, and my title would be, 'The Lady of Daisy Dingle.'"

"You think that it would be accepted?" she asked.

"I have confidence it would be one of the pictures of the year."

"I like to think of being your model," she said, "and I don't see why you need try to hide the fact that I should be a model. I should have some share in creating your work, I suppose."

"Believe me, you would be the real cause of its existence. If I had not met you——"

"Remember, I have not accepted yet," she flashed at him.

He smoothed his moustache. The Lady of Daisy Dingle was very capricious.

"Will you smoke a pipe whilst I think it out?"

He thanked her with a look.

"I like to see a painter smoke," she added.

Before he had advanced to meet her in the first instance he had thrust the photograph into his jacket pocket.

He put his hand to the cloth now to feel if it was safe, and buttoned the pocket over it. He would not have her discover that portrait for anything, yet he was convinced that it was hers.

He had smoked half-a-pipe of tobacco by the time she answered him.

"I will be the Lady of Daisy Dingle," she said simply.

He bowed.

"And you will accept my painting?"

"On one condition. That I approve of your second as being more likely to obtain a good position on the line. I refuse to believe that this would not be shown."

"It is very good of you," he answered.

"If I am to be your model I suppose you will want my name?"

"I am entirely at your mercy."

"I am a wanderer by habit, or else I should not have intruded upon you to-day. You may call me 'Gipsy.'"

"I have not a card upon me," he said somewhat confusedly, "but——"

"I would like you to give me only a name to know you by," she said.

"Would Stacy do?" he asked smilingly. "I have some right to it."

"Very well indeed."

They arranged a meeting for the morrow, and he accompanied her some way down the high road.

He returned to his easel, took up his brush, painted furiously till well on in the afternoon, putting the finishing touches on to the canvas, and then addressing the picture, said:

"Good-bye to you for a while, my friend. Before I place you in her hands I must touch you up a little more, but for a time you will find seclusion at my room in the little Devonshire inn. To-morrow I bring out the new canvas. If I can paint all that is in my heart I shall astonish the R. A's, for I love Gipsy, and against all the world I will win her to be my bride."

* * * * *

Meanwhile all was stir and bustle at the Hall. Several of the guests had arrived, but Lord Eustace Cranleigh was not among them. Julia had determined, after all, to wear the family jewels at the ball, and taking Madge into the conspiracy she set about winning her father's consent. The two of them obtained the key of the jewel safe and Julia decorated herself with the stones by Madge's assistance. Sir William Mortimer was alone at the time Gipsy Julia came into the library with a tiara of rubies and diamonds intertwined with her dark hair; she wore a necklace of costly pearls, and gold bracelets set with very valuable gems.

She had chosen the choicest jewels the Mortimer family boasted, in her wilful desire to adorn her beauty and to march into her father and storm the castle, as she called getting his consent.

Her mischievous face looked bewitching in its setting of dusky hair and glittering stones. Cousin Madge stole behind her in some trepidation; she did not know exactly how Sir William would greet them when they had broken through the partition of the study door. Julia's wilfulness had gained her the sobriquet of "Gipsy" as we have said. but however her moods were, she seemed always to carry them victoriously through.

Gipsy Julia pushed aside the door, and came into the library.

"It's a bit theatrical, dad, I know, but don't you think the effect is delightful?"

Sir William looked up from his books in blank astonishment. He had to own to himself, though, that he had never seen jewels worn to such advantage before. The array of precious stones was a revelation to him.

"Don't stop to consider, dad, do I not look ravishing?"

"I suppose if I acknowledge that, I shall lay myself open to other surprises of the kind as my lady's caprice

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prompts her. How in the world did you obtain the jewels? I thought they were safe in the strong box."

"So they were, but I am a very desperate young lady when I set about doing a thing. I stole keys and passed through winding corridors to achieve my purpose."

"I helped Julia all I could, so I must take a share in the blame uncle," laughed Madge.

"I don't think anyone could resist helping the girl if she desired it," said Sir William.

In Daisy Dingle the picture was progressing famously.

It is useless to try and hide from the acute reader any longer that the artist's model in the dress of a Devonshire village girl was Gipsy Julia. The day after

Julia turned away.

her cycling adventure, being rather disturbed at cousin Madge's continual reminder that she had behaved shamefully to the unknown painter, Julia had sought to make amends in a way of her own.

She assumed the gown and straw hat of a Devonshire village maiden, and sought the better acquaintance of the painter in Daisy Dingle. How she consented to become the model for an Academy picture we have told in a previous chapter.

She posed in a wilful way that secretly delighted "Mr. Stacy," since it gave exactly the effect he was seeking after.

The fact is the artist was infatuated with his model, and he did not stop to think that this was dangerous work he was engaged on, since he was using the palette of his heart to supply the colours he needed.

He worked feverishly at the canvas, begrudging the time that it took to moisten the brushes, and under his deft fingers an ideal Julia began to appear in an ideal Daisy Dingle.

There was the fascination of genius in the canvas. Beautiful as Julia was the artist had intensified those points that were strangest in her face, and one saw the charming personality of the girl at a glance—and as for Daisy Dingle upon this canvas, it was a revel of tangled foliage and blossom.

The picture absorbed Mr. Stacy, and his wonderful energies frightened Julia. She feared for a breakdown, and she found herself speculating sadly, not on the fate of the picture, but the fate of the man.

He said very little whilst he worked, and that period of silence gave Julia time for thought.

But why did she use the word "unknown." She found herself despising herself for that word. She understood him to the heart's core; she read his soul through his painting, and through his sparkling hazel eyes.

Another thought came and frightened her at the time, but afterwards she clung to it with desperation. Her only happiness seemed to be in cherishing it.

She loved this Mr. Stacy, this painter she had found like a fairy prince in the woods.

Hour by hour she found herself speculating on their next meeting. The visitors had arrived at Locksley Hall, and she found some trouble in evading them, but she took a roundabout way in her rustic dress to avoid them.

She found the utmost difficulty, too, in eluding Madge; plainly the girl suspected her of some strange vagary of late, but she little thought of this.

Her last had been to obtain permission to wear the jewels at the ball from her father.

She cared little about the jewels and nothing about the ball now.

She had to mix with her father's guests to a certain extent, but she always contrived to excuse herself before the hour of meeting "Mr. Stacy."

The day of the ball arrived.

At noontide Julia was again in Daisy Dingle, and the painter worked less eagerly now, for the picture was nearing completion.

Suddenly he threw down his wet brush.

The girl was watching him intently,

Did this portend what she had been fearing—the end of their acquaintance.

"It is finished," he said; "that is all that can be done in the open air. Careful studio touches are required now, but the work is done."

"Finished!" the girl echoed sadly.

"I have your beauty alone and the wonderful background of Daisy Dingle to thank for this canvas. Miss 'Gipsy,' you will stare the world in the face at the Academy."

"Do you think I care for that?" replied the girl, rather hollowly.

"No—but I do."

"It is the production of your brush."

"That is not why. Because it is the faithful portraiture of your face, that is why I admire it so. I shall become famous by your beautiful face. The world will remember my picture because I have had the most charming girl in England for my model. From London I shall send you the canvas you promised to accept, suitably framed."

"You are going away?"

"Yes, but it rests with you entirely whether I go

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away happy at heart or heartbroken. This painting is nothing to me unless I possess your love, too. Do you not know why this picture is so beautiful—why I have amazed you and myself by producing a work that must live whilst art endures? It is because I love you passionately and fondly. I have dreamt of you often before we met. Believe me, this is no chance acquaintance. Love's hand has turned the wheel of Fate for us. 'Gipsy,' will you be my bride?"

The girl turned away from him.

Her lips were parched. She could not frame an answer.

Her own soul told her this was the only man she could marry on earth, but her head sang and danced and her heart throbbed wildly. She must gain time.

He was too impulsive. She must think well over what he had said. Poor wilful Julia was beset by a score of strange doubts and fancies.

"Mr. Stacy," she gasped. "I cannot answer you now, please do not press me to."

He regarded the working of her face.

"To-night," he said, with a strange firmness, "I go to London never to return to Devonshire, if I do not have your answer. Greater love than I offer you has no man. In proof to this, hear me. I have sought you through Venice, guided only by this portrait."

He held a photo to the light and she saw in amazement that it was one of her own.

"I have found you in Devonshire, and I have lived to put your face upon canvas. If I fail to win your heart to-night, I care nothing for what happens further. I shall renounce Art. Your picture will hang in this year's Academy, but it will be unsigned. I shall send it only because I have promised it to you."

"Mr. Stacy," she pleaded, "you will give me a few hours."

"That is not love that requires consideration," his eyes told her, but she pleaded on.

They arranged to meet under the Pilgrim Beeches between Locksley Hall and Daisy Dingle at eight o'clock in the evening; then they parted and she refused his escort. Her head was burning and her heart throbbed painfully, yet throughout all her strange excitement, one exultant thought ran. He loved her and at last she knew it. An hour passed. The artist still sat in front of his canvas, but he had skilfully fastened a green baize curtain across his easel so that the painting was hidden.

How would "Gipsy" answer his question?

Had he anything to hope for?

He was asking himself this question for about the hundredth time when the trees behind parted and a young man with a gun in hand entered Daisy Dingle. It was Harry Mortimer, alone.

He made a gesture of amazement on seeing the artist and came straight towards him trailing his gun.

The artist turned.

"Well, Harry," he said.

"That's cool, to say the least of it, Eustace; and is this where you have been rusticating the last month?"

"It's about a fortnight since I first entered Daisy Dingle, I believe."

"And you promised to join us at Locksley Hall. Sir Lionel's been there days."

Lord Eustace Cranleigh, known for some time in our story as plain "Mr. Stacy," looked contrite.

"So I did, Harry; but like Dr. Syntax, I've been in search of the picturesque, and I think I've found it."

"There's little doubt of that, but what an erratic fellow you are Eustace—artist, sportsman, everything else on earth. By the way, does that box contain some of those famous tongue sandwiches we had on the Mediterranean?"

"I'm happy to say it does—though not of the same date, for in that case, they'd rival railway sandwiches. I made them up at the Sea-View Inn this morning—I must confess that's where I'm stopping."

Lord Eustace offered Harry some of the dainties, and laying on the grass the young fellow munched them with evident approval.

"You'll be staying with us at Locksley Hall to-night," he exclaimed.

"I don't think so; in fact, I have business in London."

"If the guv'nor gets to know you're here, he'll never let you leave without paying us the promised visit. Why, old fellow, to-night's the ball of the season."

Harry stood up now and drew aside the green baize.

"You don't object to me looking at your canvas?" he said.

He fell back in absolute amazement upon seeing Julia's face so beautifully set in colours among the picturesque trees of Daisy Dingle.

"What does it all mean?" he asked.

"I don't follow you."

"How have you done such a fine picture of Julia?"

"Julia—who?"

Lord Cranleigh's interjection was ungrammatic, but he was puzzled.

"Why, my sister Julia, of course."

Lord Cranleigh produced a photograph.

"That is the young lady I've painted."

"I know that. It's Julia; and that's the identical photo of her I lost at Nice."

Lord Eustace Cranleigh started.

"That's where I found it," he said. "Sit down Harry and have a smoke."

CHAPTER IV.

Julia had to attend the ball at Locksley Hall in the evening. Her heart was restless and she would have given much to be free.

She dressed in company with Madge, and was quite forgetting the jewels she had meant to wear. Her cousin brought them from the safe and adorned her with them until her hair gave out a wild glitter, and her neck and bodice sparkled with beautiful gems.

"They look wonderful!" said Madge, and Julia's maid gasped for breath when the girl stood forward in all the glory of the Mortimer gems.

Gipsy Julia stood with flushed face in front of the long mirror, and Madge of course attributed her excitement to the new sensation of wearing the Mortimer jewels.

But it was quite another matter that engaged Julia's mind. "I love him, I love him," she kept repeating under her voice.

Plainly the painter of Daisy Dingle had a good chance of winning Gipsy Julia's heart after all. When she appeared in the ballroom the girl attracted all the attention.

Harry kept a keen watch upon his sister, but he could not help remarking to himself, knowing her moods so well:

"I think Stacy stands a fine chance of winning this

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set. It's about a certainty. Well, the dear old fellow will be a most estimable brother-in-law."

After a deal of perseverance he found Lord Cranleigh in the grounds, and prevailed on him to stroll up to the French windows opening on the lawn. Here they had a full view of the ballroom. As they stood within the shadows, an entrancing melody rippled through the windows as though to charm the starlight from the skies.

But Lord Cranleigh was not listening.

He had caught sight of Julia in all her wealth of flashing jewels, and his heart beat tumultuously. Yet here in her father's hall and amongst her compeers in position and birth, she was not more beautiful to him than she had been on the first occasion they met when she wore her Devonshire village dress. No, he loved her best as the simple Lady of Daisy Dingle.

And then he stole away from the window, and when Harry Mortimer sought to speak with him, he was nowhere to be found.

And how did Julia fare? She was thinking how best to escape from the ball-room unobserved, that she might keep tryst under the Pilgrim Beeches. The inanities of a ball-room butterfly were boring her to distraction, and she was racking her brains how to get rid of him decently, when she caught sight of Madge, and with a hurried "excuse me!" ran after her little cousin.

"Oh, Madge," said Julia, "I have something to tell you; will you accompany me to my room?"

"Why, whatever can be the matter, you look so wild and strange. I actually thought you were going to strike that young Grayling just now. You looked like a tigress robbed of her offspring."

Julia coloured and laughed.

"I must tell you all, dear," she said, "for I want your help."

And then the lovely girl poured her full secret into the willing ears of Madge. At first the quiet girl refused to have anything to do with such a wild undertaking, but she had to give way to the eager protestations of Gipsy.

A woollen shawl and a sun-bonnet were soon found, and under this disguise and favoured by the night Julia stole out by a corridor door like Dorothy Varden of old, and made her way to Pilgrim Beeches, where her lover was impatiently awaiting her.

It was a glorious starlight night and the moon would shortly rise, and Julia, impatient of delay, sped through the woods of her father's estate. And now she neared the beeches; she could see the man she adored pacing backwards and forwards. Another step, and with a little fluttering cry she was in his arms. The moon was rising and cast her silver beams athwart the glades, and there was a ghostly look and silence all around.

"Are you sure you love me? How can you? It was only the other day that we met?"

The man's answer was not given in words, but the girl spoke no more of doubt. And yet she thought she was engaged to plain Mr. Stacy.

"My father will never consent to the match," she said in her innocence. "I believe he had thoughts of my marrying a Lord Cranleigh, who was to have visited us, but who, I am thankful to say, never turned up."

Her companion actually laughed, and, after chasing away her look of amazement with a kiss, he enlightened her as to the true state of affairs.

"But I shall never be able to trust you again, you deceitful thing," she pouted; but the knowledge that she had won a title as well as true love did not detract from the sweetness of the conquest, and they strolled together to the hall to receive the paternal blessings.

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Short Stories That . . . . . Make You Laugh.

We devote every week space in *Short Stories* to pithy, humorous anecdotes similar to those which appear in these columns. A prize of £1 1s. will be sent to the reader who submits the best storyette this week, and a Stereoscope to each of those whose attempts are used. The anecdotes may be either original or selected; in the latter case, the source MUST be stated. Attempts must reach the Storyette Editor, *Short Stories* Office, Henrietta Street, Strand, London, W.C., by Monday, May 20th. Post-cards only, please. The prize of One Guinea has been awarded this week to Mr. H. Cross, of East Street, Alresford, Hants, whose contribution is denoted by a star thus.*

"IT is you women who make all the trouble in life." "Yes, and who make life worth the trouble."

"MISS BINKS hasn't a particle of social instinct." "What do you mean?" "Why, when she is invited to lunch, she talks more than the girl who is to pay the bill."

"WHAT, you call me pretty? Why, I am an old woman, my hair is turning white, and look, here is a wrinkle!" "A wrinkle! No, madam, it is a smile that has drifted from its moorings!"

"I DUNNO," said Farmer Corntossel, "but what I'd kind of enjoy running a rice farm over in China." "Why, you'd be a Chinaman." "Yes. But it would be somethin' of a comfort to live in some place where your predictions that the country was goin' to pieces stood some chance of comin' true."

YOUNG WIFE: "Then you won't fulfil this trifling request of mine?" Husband: "Not on any account!" The wife silently brings out a phonograph, which, on being set in motion, pronounces audibly the following words: "Dearest Agnes, when once we are married, I will do my utmost to carry out every wish I can read in your eyes!"

"I DON'T stoop to vulgarity, sir," said the irate visitor to the editor. "Yes, I had observed that," responded the editor cheerfully. "I'm glad you have, sir." "Don't mention it," begged the editor blandly. "I am sure a person of your character would never stoop to vulgarity." "No, sir, no——" "No, of course not," interrupted the editor, "he would have to reach up to it."

A SWANSEA lawyer noticed the other evening that his youthful son, who was studying arithmetic, seemed very restless. Getting impatient the father broke out: "What on earth ails you? Why can't you sit still—wriggling about every minute?" "It's all your fault," murmured the boy. "Why is it?" "'Cos I asked you last night how much a billion was and you said it was a thundering lot! The teacher asked me the same question to-day, and I said what you told me. That is why I can't keep still."

"MR. CRIMSONBEAK, will you show me your chickens if I come down to your house some day?" asked little Johnny Yeast of that gentleman, the other evening, when he and his wife were calling at the Yeast residence. "Why, Johnny, I don't keep chickens," replied Mr. Crimsonbeak, gently patting the boy on the head; "what made you think I did?" "Why, whenever I hear mamma mention your name, she always calls you the hen-pecked husband; but I can't see how you can be hen-pecked if you don't keep any chickens." Johnny suddenly vanished from the room, and took his father's elevator for the garret.

AN irritable old bachelor says that women are like cats; both are graceful, both are domestic, and—some scratch.

"I UNDERSTAND you were well off before you married?" said the lawyer. "Yes," replied the witness, "but, like a fool, I didn't know it."

BERTHA: "I'm sorry you asked me to marry you. It pains me to refuse." Will (cheerfully): "Oh, don't worry. Perhaps you know best what I'm escaping."

MRS. NEWWED: "What! You have no income but your salary? You told me you had money to burn!" Mr. Newwed: "Well, I've just paid for a ton of coal, haven't I?"

YOUNG HUSBAND: "Yes, dear, you look nice in that dress; but it cost me a lot of money." Young Wife: "Dick, dear, what do I care for money when it is a question of pleasing you?"

POSTMAN (to boarding-house maidservant): "Here's a letter for Mr. Jeremiah O'Flatherty." Servant: "Well, 'tis the clever man ye are to know his name, sure, he only kem here last night!"

"WHAT's the matter with you?" asked the sympathetic friend; "an attack of grip?" "No; this isn't grip. I haven't time to stay at home and send for a doctor. This is simply a bad cold."

TEACHER (to his class): "What is a jewel?" First Boy: "A precious stone, sir." Teacher: "What is a precious stone?" Second Boy: "A stone that is worth a great deal of money." Teacher: "Name me one?" Second Boy: "A tombstone, sir."

UGLY CUSTOMER: "What price did you say this cape was?" Pretty Milliner: "Seven guineas, madam." Ugly Customer (after a pause): "Don't you think it rather a dreadful figure?" Pretty Milliner: "Well, madam, since you say so, it is not the best I have seen—but I think you'll find the cape will hide it!"

AN old countryman was in Liverpool on the day that the men of Strathcona's horse were to pass through the city on their way home. Not knowing for what reason so many people were waiting about in the streets, he made inquiries, and on being told that they were waiting to see Strathcona's Horse pass by, he said: "Well, I'm jiggered! It mun be a mighty fine 'oss for so many people to come to see it go by!"

A HUNGRY tourist had put up for the night at a wayside inn and found the supper rather scanty, the most substantial part of it being a single sausage. With a fault-finding look and gesture he called the innkeeper to his side. "Is this the best you can do in the way of a sausage?" asked the traveller. "Why, now," said the host, "isn't it good enough?" "Oh, it's good enough, perhaps, but the ends don't suit me." "The ends! What's the matter with them?" "Too near together," said the hungry man. And the innkeeper took the hint.

* AT the conclusion of the assizes at a certain northern town the legal luminaries indulged in a cricket match. A certain well-known judge presently occupied the wicket, and so persistently did he display the stone-walling tactics that his opponents despaired of getting him out. After a futile appeal of "leg before," the judge said to the umpire: "I wonder if I am to be imprisoned here until the next assizes?" He had hardly spoken when an extra fast one removed the cross-pieces. "No, my lord," replied the umpire, with a sly grin, "you are bailed out."

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A KEEPER OF SECRETS.

THE PAPER IN THE BUHL CABINET.

Of the many problems placed before Hugo Pontifex during his singular professional career, the one which admitted of the least delay in its solution was that submitted by the beautiful Mrs. Marsham.

Mrs. Cornelius Marsham, at the time of her call upon Mr. Pontifex, had figured for some three years as the newest and smartest of Society dames. A mansion in Park Lane, a villa at Cowes, a castle in Scotland, a husband on the Stock Exchange, these were a few of her fashionable qualifications. In addition, she had planned a huge bazaar, entertained Royalty, and "discovered" a popular tenor. When, therefore, the usual curt announcements informed the world that Helen Marsham had been left a widow, not a few people asked themselves, with more cynicism than good taste, "Who'll be her next, and how soon will it come off?"

Although the questioners might have learnt the fact with some surprise, the answer to this enigma depended, for some sixteen hours or so, upon the redoubtable Hugo Pontifex. He was, indeed, consulted by Mrs. Marsham on the very day of her husband's death.

Despite her black skirts, dark cloak, and thick veil, the solicitor recognised in the delicate profile and elastic frame, a client of wealth and distinction. Sitting down, at his request, by the heavy oak table near the window, she put up the close net which screened her features—they were both lovely and animated.

"Mr. Pontifex," she said, "are you a fit adviser for those who, before coming to you, have lost hope?"

The lawyer was struck by the directness and daring of the query.

"I believe I am," he responded, "I can honestly say that I do not often prove scrupulous about means, so long as the end in view is legitimate."

Mrs. Marsham glanced shrewdly at the speaker.

"So you read thoughts," she commented, "would you could annihilate written ones, and through steel walls!"

"Nothing is impossible, madam," observed Hugo Pontifex blandly, "but I do not recommend my clients to talk in riddles—it wastes time."

His visitor flushed; the hint was almost too broad.

"You are right," she owned, embarrassed by Mr. Pontifex's irony, "and I beg your pardon. I will be brief. My name you already know; my address, for the present, is Namaqua House, Park Lane. I am the wife, or, rather, the widow, of Cornelius Marsham, the South African Railway King."

"Who, so far from being dead," said the lawyer drily, "presided last night over a hospital dinner at the Hotel Cecil."

"And who," completed the other, "on his arrival home, was seized by an attack of suppressed gout, and died this morning at five o'clock. My presence here is due to that catastrophe."

Hugo Pontifex bent his head, but offered no apology for the insinuation by which he had brought Mrs. Marsham to the point.

"My husband," said his client, "was, it is notorious, a rich and uncultured speculator. He had made, and lost, several fortunes in the Colonies. His had been a rough life, and much of it he would not have had published for untold millions. His most dangerous secret—the history of his connection with a huge and profitable bank fraud—he imagined to be in his exclusive keeping. Two years ago, however, a man appeared on the scene, who was aware of certain facts which would have incriminated Cornelius, had they been disclosed. This fellow, a French emigrant, Jules Lemaire, bled my husband mercilessly, under threats of exposure. A drunken, foul-mouthed boor, he accompanied us everywhere, and turned our existence into a veritable inferno."

The lawyer twisted his sapphire ring; the impending shadow of some violent act seemed to chill the warmth of the April sunbeams that flooded St. James' Street and penetrated even to Mr. Pontifex's private apartment.

"At last," pursued Helen Marsham, sternly, "the inevitable result occurred. Cornelius turned upon Lemaire. Beside himself with rage and champagne, he shot his persecutor through the back as they were drinking in the billiard-room at Park Lane. The revolver was small, and the explosion unheard by the servants. Sobered with alarm, Cornelius fled for me. I hastened to the spot, Lemaire was speechless and evidently dying."

Mrs. Marsham caught her breath—the recollection of the tragedy she had described swept over her with sudden force. Hugo Pontifex pushed a revolving stand in a piece of furniture at his elbow. A decanter slid into view, with a syphon and glasses. The solicitor tilted a small quantity of the spirit into a tumbler, diluted it with soda, and set it before his client. She sipped the mixture tremblingly.

"In the midst of my distress and terror," she went on, "I had an idea. As a girl, I had been acquainted with a young medical student, Edmund Cochrane. He—he loved me, and, to be honest, I returned his love. But I was powerless; my mother exerted great influence upon me, and I married Cornelius Marsham. For a considerable period we resided at the Cape."

Hugo Pontifex sighed; he liked to believe in women and such stories of disloyalty pained him.

"From letters which reached me," said Helen Marsham, relinquishing the glass she had been holding; "I had gathered that Edmund, though a brilliant Cavendish Square physician by now, continued a bachelor, and wondered if it were constancy or pique. When I heard of the dreadful scandal that hung over us, I sent for him, explained all, and begged him, for my sake, to save Cornelius' reputation. My tears mastered his judgment, he consented to aid us. Lemaire was dumb, the bullet had injured his spine; we got him to bed and Edmund and I nursed him for a month. Then he died; Dr. Cochrane signed a false death-certificate, and he was buried."

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The circlet of gold on Mr. Pontifex's finger slipped round and round; he was listening intently.

"There was no reason," proceeded his client; "why things should not have gone on smoothly after that. But Cornelius grew jealous of Edmund—Dr. Cochrane—and discovering that he himself had but a short while to live—his drinking habits had excited a constitutional ailment—devised a horrible scheme to prevent my marrying the doctor, if I should become a widow."

"May I infer your willingness to contract such a marriage?" interpolated the solicitor.

Mrs. Marsham trifled with her watch-chain.

"I suppose I must tell the truth," she faltered; "yes, I would have accepted Edmund had he asked me. I never cared for Cornelius, nor has money reconciled me to my splendid fate. Why should I not be happy? I would have taken Edmund immediately I was free, and Cornelius realized it."

"You *would* have," repeated Hugo Pontifex, emphasizing the second word. "What is the obstacle? Will the doctor not renew his suit in due season, or has Mr. Marsham's device succeeded?"

Helen Marsham shuddered.

"It has not, yet," she replied; "but it will—if you cannot help me. And it will not only separate me for ever from the man I love, it may send him to a felon's cell. You are a lawyer, Mr. Pontifex, you should remember that an accessory subsequent to the fact in murder may receive a term of penal servitude."

Hugo Pontifex meditated.

"What is this scheme of your husband's?" he inquired.

Mrs. Marsham blanched.

"To betray Cochrane to the authorities," she answered; "by a paper that, his will directs, is to be produced after the funeral from a buhl cabinet in his bed-chamber, the key of the cabinet being in his solicitor's possession. The document is to be read to the mourners present and forwarded to the Commissioner of Police. This paper, as Cornelius had the effrontery to inform me, records the murder of Jules Lemaire and Dr. Cochrane's assistance in hiding it. The confession, though not evidence against Edmund, would place the authorities on the track of indisputable proof; the bullet shattered Lemaire's spine and was never extracted. Exhumation could not fail to demonstrate—even after an interval of two years—the falsity of the death-certificate."

"Did you not weigh," demanded Mr. Pontifex, "the advisability of destroying the confession, prior to Mr. Marsham's death, or just afterwards?"

"Yes," said Helen Marsham; "but before he died he used to look at the paper each evening he was in town and chuckle over it. The compartment held nothing else, and it was thrown in loosely as if to tempt me. Yet had I sought to abstract and burn it he would have had tangible grounds for his jealousy—which, so far, only rested upon my old flirtation with Edmund—and could have replaced the confession forthwith. This morning I hurried to the cabinet, and unlocked the section whence I had seen him take the paper. He had laid a trap to mock me! There were double doors to the compartment—the outer of wood and brass, the inner of steel, joined to steel linings. That portion of the cabinet is really a strong safe, clamped to the joists of the flooring. My husband's key for the inner door I cannot find; he has concealed it too effectively."

Hugo Pontifex pursed his expressive lips.

"It is a tight corner," he allowed.

"If it were not," was the cool retort, "would I have troubled you?"

Much earnest persuasion was requisite before the Jew trader would consent to be satisfied of his visitor's good faith.

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The lawyer gazed into the sapphire depths of his favourite jewel.

"What time to-night," he asked, "can you admit me—unseen, excepting by yourself—to the chamber where this cabinet is situated?"

Mrs. Marsham pondered.

"It would not be quite prudent until nearly two o'clock," she decided; "I will arrange to sit up alone with—*it*."

The wife of the dead railway magnate shivered as she pronounced the syllable which stood for his unconscious clay.

Mr. Pontifex marvelled at the courage and intelligence that prompted the suggestion. But he reminded himself that Helen Marsham was in love with Edmund Cochrane, and that for the prosperous physician both honour and liberty hung upon the issue of Hugo Pontifex's manœuvres.

"Very well," he said; "expect me at two o'clock."

"May I ask what you propose doing?" inquired Helen Marsham, an uncontrollable doubt revealing itself in her face.

"The one thing necessary," vouchsafed the solicitor; "to annihilate your husband's malignant confession."

"But the safe is locked and fireproof," objected the other. Mr. Pontifex rose formally.

"The commission is yours, the method mine," he said, and rang for her to be shown out. His client drew down her veil, fastened her cloak, and departed, a striking yet anxious figure.

"That is not a frequent type of woman," remarked Hugo Pontifex, as he crossed to his wardrobe-closet and began to attire himself in the shabbiest of his costumes. His sympathy for Helen Marsham was eclipsed, nevertheless, by his pleasure at the difficulty of the riddle with which he had, after a fashion, already grappled.

Leaving St. James' Street, he drove eastwards to the fringe of the London docks and alighted in a wide but squalid thoroughfare. From this he walked deliberately into a maze of odorous little streets.

Halting, at length, before a nondescript shop, half ironmonger's, half marine-store dealer's, he strode over the dusky threshold.

A ringleted Jew shuffled to meet the lawyer, and Mr. Pontifex, abandoning his usual crisp English, relapsed into a jargon of which his aristocratic friends would have comprehended but an occasional word. He was using the peculiar back-slang of the expert criminal.

Much earnest persuasion was requisite before the Jew trader would consent to be satisfied of his visitor's good faith. Finally a rouleau of sovereigns passed from palm to palm, and Hugo Pontifex was able to slip into the pockets of his brown coat an array of glittering metal oddments.

Among them were a quartette of bars made to join, by stout screws or by hooked ends, into a square frame. Upon one side of this frame was a swivelled socket, operated by a powerful lever.

Ballasted with his new acquisitions, Hugo Pontifex returned to his office, and, by the entrance at its rear, visited his private apartment. Depositing his equipment in a corner, he sallied out once more, completed a strange series of purchases in Soho, and regaining his room, substituted for his villainous clothes an elegant evening suit.

Dinner and the theatre disposed of his leisure, and, in the second of the small hours, having donned his shabby garments and laden himself with the articles collected for the expedition, Mr. Pontifex, by devious routes, attained the locality of Park Lane. Upon the stroke of two, the massive portals of Namaqua House, which he had been patiently observing, opened, and the disguised lawyer darted in as silently as a phantom might have done.

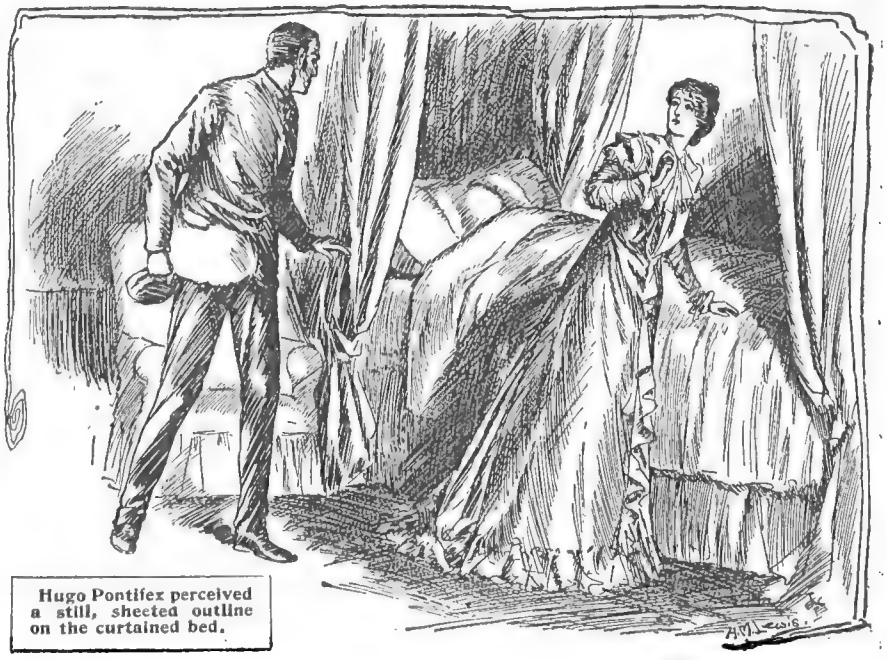
A vague form, whose determined grace proclaimed it that of Helen Marsham, was waiting within the hall-way, it glided along the corridor and Mr. Pontifex followed it. Up an ample flight of stairs the solicitor marched—his footsteps noiseless upon the soft pile of the luxurious carpets.

His escort's goal was a large chamber on the first storey—a chamber lighted only by a shaded lamp.

Mrs. Marsham piloted him into the room and secured the latch. She was clad in a costly dressing-gown of heliotrope silk, through whose loose sleeves her white arms showed firm and supple. By the subdued glow that filled the place, Hugo Pontifex perceived a still and sheeted outline on the curtained bed.

Dismissing the melancholy reflections which crowded upon him, the lawyer arranged, in a species of scientific order, the different parts of the apparatus he had brought. His client contemplated his actions.

"You are going to try and break into the safe," she



Hugo Pontifex perceived a still, sheeted outline on the curtained bed.

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observed abruptly. "It is useless; the name of the maker will convince you of that."

Hugo Pontifex frowned. "Madam," he answered her, "I am not in the habit of leaving any contingency unprovided for. Have the kindness to show me the buhl cabinet."

Helen Marsham touched the shade over the lamp and a band of light fell athwart the floor. It illuminated a fine rosewood antique, narrow and upright, with characteristic brass ornamentation. Mrs. Marsham unlocked one of the lower compartments. As she had said, the front was double, a tiny safe had been fitted into that section of the cabinet.

The lawyer sought to remove the cabinet, but it resisted—it was bolted to the floor by means of the safe. The prevision of Cornelius Marsham had been thorough.

Quietly Mr. Pontifex thrust behind the wooden casing a short iron bar, unscrewed and removed the front of the compartment, constructed a square frame about the base of the cabinet, fixed a drill to the swivelled socket and began to work the lever. He had set the tool at a downward angle, adjusted it to the steel door of the safe, and muffled the ratchets in a borrowed cushion.

For a couple of hours he plied the bar which revolved the drill. At the end of that time he had pierced a single hole in the plates of the safe—it penetrated the fireproof packing and the interior wall of the steel chest. He paused, substituted a bigger drill, and started to increase the width of the bore.

"Let me," murmured Helen Marsham, "I am stronger than you think."

The lawyer yielded the lever to her, and she toiled on in silence, with the lamp burning steadily and the dead man for an impassive witness. Of all the experiences that had been permitted to Hugo Pontifex, this was fated to dwell the longest in his memory.

When the piercing was enlarged from the diameter of a knitting-needle to that of a lead pencil, Mr. Pontifex motioned to his assistant, and she suspended her labours.

The solicitor had taken up a transparent funnel with a thin stem. This he inserted at the orifice left by the drill, and thrust it forward. It disappeared up to the expanding mouth. Drawing a deeper breath as he discovered the satisfactory nature of the bore, Mr. Pontifex emptied into the funnel a packet of powdered crystals and forced them through the tube by means of a wire.

"You will not risk an explosion, surely?" queried his client. The lawyer's sole response was a grimace of vexation—nothing irritated him more than questions which impugned his practical wisdom.

Picking up a phial with a glass stopper, he poured its contents gently after the crystals. Then, catching at a portable spirit-lamp that had dwarf bellows attached, he finished his performance by fusing a mass of solder upon the orifice of the bore.

Helen Marsham studied him incredulously as he wiped

The door swung wide—with it there came a blast of poisonous gas.

the steel dust from his fingers and commenced to secrete about him the various portions of his apparatus.

"How will all that aid us?" she asked him. The solicitor grunted disdainfully—for Hugo Pontifex, even the beautiful and courageous Mrs. Marsham had her limitations.

"I have arranged a process," he explained, "that is filling the safe with chlorine fumes. They will negate the colouring matter in the ink upon your husband's confession and probably destroy the tissue of the paper itself. If the pure sulphuric acid I used has reached the document it will wipe it out of existence."

His client extended her hands impulsively. "You are a genius, Mr. Pontifex," she said; "pardon me for presuming to dream of criticizing you."

"Don't trouble yourself about that, Mrs. Marsham," advised Hugo Pontifex; "it is the way of the world—to be wise after the event."

As Helen Marsham blushed under the rebuke, he

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screwed the wooden door of the cabinet into position, swept the grains of sparkling metal from the carpet and restored the antique and its surroundings to their pristine neatness.

"Wire me when the funeral is to take place," he instructed; "I must be witness to the unlocking of the safe—your lawyer will doubtless expect to come up here, by himself or with you. Permit me to convoy him as the game is not yet played out."

Mrs. Marsham prepared to lead Mr. Pontifex downstairs. As he left the chamber he glanced back at the buhl cabinet and the rigid shape upon the bed—and smiled. Professional pride was his ruling emotion—that smile spoke volumes.

* * * * *

Hugo Pontifex's next meeting with Mrs. Marsham was in a little boudoir at Namaqua House and occurred a day or two afterwards. The solicitor had been summoned from the library where a score of the guests at the funeral of the South African Railway King speculated upon the purport of the mysterious document, so soon to be read to them, and concerning which countless improbable stories had been rife in Society and the Press.

When Mr. Pontifex entered the boudoir he did not find Mrs. Marsham alone. By her was a handsome man in early middle-life, with shining blue orbs, closely cropped beard and drooping moustaches.

"Mr. Pontifex," said Mrs. Marsham shyly; "this is Dr. Cochrane. Dr. Cochrane, you know Mr. Pontifex to be an inestimable friend of ours."

The doctor and Hugo Pontifex exchanged a cordial hand-clasp. Helen Marsham turned to the remaining person present—a lean and severe personage in a very high collar, Mr. Pontifex recognised him as a prosperous, but kindly West End solicitor.

"Mr. Bendyshe," said Helen Marsham, "let me introduce you to Mr. Pontifex, my own legal adviser. I desire him to witness the opening of the buhl cabinet referred to in my husband's will. Here is the key of the compartment in question."

She gave up the article mentioned and glanced anxiously at Hugo Pontifex, who ignoring her agitation, bowed to his colleague. Mr. Bendyshe returned the salutation.

"Shall we proceed, then, to the late Mr. Marsham's apartment?" he suggested.

Mr. Pontifex coincided with the proposition.

"Permit me to pilot you," he said; "for me the route is a familiar one." And the lawyers, excusing themselves to Mrs. Marsham, went amicably up the stairs of Namaqua House towards the chamber of the buhl cabinet.

As they mounted the flight Mr. Bendyshe took a complicated steel trifle from his pocket.

"My client, Pontifex," he remarked; "was an extraordinary fellow. The cabinet we are going to, or some portion of it, conceals a safe, of which this is the key. I'll bet you a thousand Mrs. M. tried to get a peep at the paper and was disconcerted when she came upon iron walls and a modern lock. Is that why you're here, eh? Ha, ha!"

Mr. Pontifex's lips twitched, but he evaded the jest with practised skill, and they entered the room side by side.

His colleague unfastened the wooden door of the lowest compartment in the buhl cabinet. The silver patch of solder which remained to testify to Hugo Pontifex's proceedings caught the other's eye. He noted it curiously as he slipped the key into the wards.

Mr. Pontifex laid a hand on his coat-sleeve. "Open that with a long arm, Bendyshe," he recommended; "and turn your head aside."

Bendyshe stared at him and shrank back. "Is it an infernal machine?" he gasped. Hugo Pontifex strode up, twisted the projecting steel ring of the key, and pulled at the knob. The door swung wide—with it there came a blast of poisonous gas. Bendyshe sprang to the window and flung it up, Hugo Pontifex was able to see, before imitating his example, that a folded sheet, lying on the bottom of the safe, shivered and vanished as paper ash will do in a current of air.

Joining his colleague at the window, Mr. Pontifex addressed him gravely. "Bendyshe," he said, "you are aware of my standing in the profession. Let me give you some counsel and a piece of information. That paper contained, to Mrs. Marsham's knowledge, the confession of a crime committed by her husband. To save his reputation, she destroyed the document by drilling a hole into the safe and inserting chemicals. You cannot prosecute her with dignity or any hope of success. Go down and tell those sensation-hunters in the library that you could find no paper, such as that described by your client."

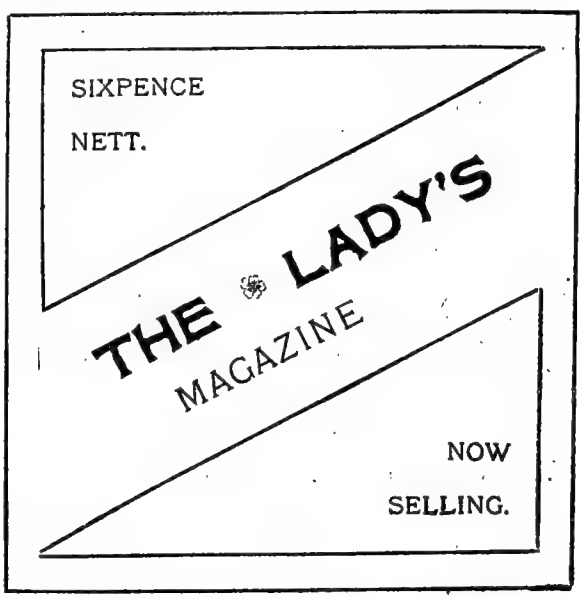
"Good gracious," exclaimed Mr. Bendyshe. "Well, I suppose I had better. Mrs. M. has my sympathy, and she is a plucky creature, I allow. But it was a reckless thing to do, Pontifex—a very reckless thing to do."

He went downstairs, muttering to himself and coughing to get the chlorine fumes off his chest. Hugo Pontifex followed—smiling.

He dined the same evening with Dr. Cochrane, and together they drank the health of the beautiful Helen Marsham.

"Mrs. Cochrane that is to be," said the doctor.

"I congratulate you," answered Hugo Pontifex, "she is no ordinary woman—except that she will ask superfluous questions."



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RAMEE'S MALEDICTION.

"I HAVE not the least doubt that the last of those four rascals is on my track again, my boy," said Colonel Jarvis, somewhat sadly. "It is a war of extermination between us; it has lasted for twelve years, and I was hoping he was dead, seeing that he has not troubled me for five years or more."

"Why did you not tell me of this before, dad," asked Harry Jarvis, looking from the locket in his hand to the face of his father.

"It was not necessary," replied the other man. "But now that this vendetta has been renewed, which must mean that you are also menaced, I am bound to tell you."

"Tell me exactly how the thing stands," said Harry Jarvis in a tone of decision. "I've got a certain amount of pluck——"

"A great deal of it!" interrupted his father with hearty admiration. "It's a great pity you weren't stronger in constitution, for you would have made a splendid soldier."

"I think I have enough constitution to take some of this burden from your shoulder, dad," said the young fellow, affectionately. "Now, tell me."

"It began in the Mutiny," said the colonel, settling himself back in his chair, his eyes assuming a far-away look as he recalled the sad and exciting incidents. "Fate took me away from Cawnpore at the beginning of May, 1857, and when the news came of the rising, I was ill with the fever. You were in England, at school, and your mother perished with many others on that dreadful day in June. You were kept in ignorance of ——"

The old soldier's voice failed, but by a great effort he restrained his emotion and continued.

"As soon as I could get back well enough to be of any use, I was on active service again. I learnt some of the horrible details in due time, thanks chiefly to Kusa. The Malay, grateful to me for having saved him from being murdered in Banca three years previously, had attached himself to me with a fidelity not very common among his people. I had left him with your mother, and he nearly lost his life in doing what he could for the unfortunate Europeans. He was stunned and left for dead.

"He told me how your mother was murdered and that locket taken from her. He said he would recognise the man who did it. A month afterwards he had the opportunity of identifying the assassin, and did so.

"Kusa did valuable service as a spy, and he led me and a company of men to a gang of rebels which included the murderer. A fight took place, many were killed, some escaped and some were taken prisoners, including him. Kusa obtained some details concerning this man, which were curious at the time and became of paramount interest to me afterwards.

"He was a descendant of a Thug. The old sect of stranglers was supposed to have been suppressed and they were kept under Government supervision, but some of them are secret poisoners to this day, and Ramee had resolved to start a fresh sect in conjunction with his four brothers, but instead of using the turban or silk handkerchief, they were to use the knife, and instead of strangling, they were to sever the heads of their victims. From this, I will leave you to guess the manner of your mother's death—certainly it was merciful.

"I found the locket in the wretch's possession, and Kusa told me that the portrait of your mother—that at which you are still looking—had been taken by him as an image of the goddess Kali. The locket itself is of Hindoo workmanship, and the Thug was impressed with the idea that it was a religious relic of the past.

"When I dragged it from him, he screamed and struggled like a veritable demon and uttered all sorts of oaths and threats.

"We made short work of him; we tied him to the mouth of a cannon and then fired it. You know that they think they will never reach paradise if the body is thus destroyed, and this punishment was adopted to deter others.

"When Ramee was tied to the gun and was convinced that there was no hope for him, he became quieter. He turned his head in my direction and gave utterance to these fearful words—I remember them well:

"'My brothers will avenge me. Wherever you go, they will hunt you down until your head and your body are parted, and the image of Kali is in their hands. You and yours, and all others who help you, shall suffer the same fate! My brothers will hear these words.'

"I smiled contemptuously and gave the order that put an end to the murderer's existence. In the exciting events that followed, I forgot the malediction. I was engaged in administrating work after the Mutiny, and it was while I was filling an onerous post in Bengal that I was unpleasantly reminded of the existence of Ramee's brothers.

"It was nearly two years after the execution of Ramee, when I was struck at by a native while making my road homeward one evening. The knife entered my left arm, and before my assailant could recover himself I shot him dead with my revolver. When I was able to get a fair look at the man's face, his resemblance to Ramee proved to be so striking that I could not mistake it.

"This incident made me uneasy. I confess that I was not disturbed on your account, Harry, because I concluded those wretches would not trouble to go to England and attack you while I was still in India and in possession of the locket; besides that, it was just a question that they knew of your existence. And, curiously enough, I understood the malediction to be directed against only those who helped me, whether relatives or friends.

"I told Kusa, and took all necessary precautions. In time my own vigilance relaxed, but the Malay remained just as watchful, and it was he who saved me the second time. The would-be assassin sprang at me from behind, passing one arm under my chin and dragging my head back; but Kusa plunged his *kriss* into his back and saved me. How did Kusa come to be there? That I do no know, except that he made it a duty to watch over me.

"The third attack came about seven years ago, while I was on the banks of the Ganges. I heard a noise behind me and turned just in time to avoid a blow. There were two of them. I clenched my fist and delivered a blow straight from the shoulder, hitting my assailant fairly between the eyes and knocking

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him into the river. That gave me time to draw my revolver ready for the second one, but he fled. I had stunned the first and he was drowned in the river.

"Twice after that, and within a very short space of time, incidents occurred that showed me that the fourth man was still pursuing his object; but we never came to close quarters. Between the second and third attacks, also, there had been suspicious incidents."

"And nothing has taken place between then and now," asked Harry Jarvis, as his father paused, "to arouse your suspicions?"

"Nothing whatever," answered the colonel.

The occurrence which had disturbed the equanimity of Colonel Jarvis was this—Kusa had just reported having seen the face of a Hindoo at one of the lower windows of the house; he had at once rushed into the open in order to capture the intruder, but the Hindoo had entirely disappeared. The colonel, unwilling to believe that his old enemy was again on his track, thought that Kusa might have been mistaken, but this argument was quickly demolished by Kusa's quiet expression of content by the discovery of a shred of clothing on the ivy that mantled the wall.

"I am glad that you have told me all about it," said Harry, "and we must take energetic measures to foil this wretch and bring him to justice. Of course, we can guard you, but I think it will be best for you to go abroad. That will serve two purposes. Your health has been breaking up lately; you need a change; and if this man knows that I am guarding the locket, and at the same time, is ignorant of your whereabouts, he will turn his attention to me. If he does, I think that Kusa and I can deal with him."

Colonel Jarvis would not listen to this proposal at first; it went against the grain of the soldier to retire before an enemy, but the younger man returned to the charge again and again until his dominant will overcame the opposition of a will rendered weaker by failing health.

"All right, Harry!" exclaimed the Colonel at the end of a discussion on the following morning. "I'll give in to you, especially as you will, no doubt, be included in the malediction whether I stay or go. The wretch will take it for granted that you are assisting me to defeat his ends."

"Of course he will! and if you go away I shall feel more free to deal with him, because I shall not be afraid of your coming to harm. If he does not show himself in some way after you are gone, I shall wire to you to be extra careful and shall come after you."

Although Kusa and Harry kept ever on the alert for some sign of the Thug during that day and the next, they failed to detect any indication of his presence in the vicinity. That evening Colonel Jarvis went off without anyone, except his son and the Malay, being aware of it, he took a circuitous route, then went by train to the London terminus, where he took a ticket for the South of France. No one accompanied him; he left the house quite alone.

Then Harry and Kusa awaited developments. The young fellow took every opportunity of informing his friends in the most casual manner that he was carrying the locket on his person; this was not an unnatural thing to do in memory of his mother, and the explanation why he had not done so before was satisfactory enough—he had not known of its existence.

"I have no doubt that this fact will become known all over the place and will get to the ears of our dusky enemy," said Harry to himself. "That's just what I want, for it will turn his attention to me. Where that fellow hides himself I have no idea, but there is no question that these rascally, crafty Thugs do get the information they want. I hope I shall see something of him soon, or I shall get anxious about dad and shall have to wire to him."

Harry apprehended that he ran more danger at night than in the daytime, and he concluded that the Thug was more likely to make an attempt on him while asleep than when awake; so he took great precautions against a surprise visit to his bedroom. He had the chimney and window securely barred, his door locked and something heavy placed against it, and a loaded revolver near his hand.

It was on the fourth day after the colonel's departure, when Kusa came stealthily towards his young master when the latter returned from an afternoon's stroll. There was not much expression in the Malay's face at any time, but on this occasion his countenance and his manner both denoted that he had news to tell.

"What is it, Kusa?" asked Harry. He felt anxious and relieved at the same time, for if the Thug were still in the neighbourhood, the colonel was all right.

"He been here!" was Kusa's answer. "In yoo bedroom."

"Oh!" exclaimed Harry in a surprised tone. "How do you know?"

Instead of replying, the Malay put his hand on the arm of his master and conducted him to the bedroom.

The little case which had held the locket until Harry begun to wear it, was lying on the floor; it had been forced open.

"How did he get in?" asked Harry, looking about for an answer. "Not by the window or the chimney. Then he must have come by the door! This is serious, Kusa! He has managed to get through the house in some way without being seen; perhaps he is in hiding now!"

"I tink not!" replied Kusa, with a smile that convinced Harry. "I look about and have de dog. But here someting more ser'ous!"

He went to the pillow and, placing a hand on each end of it, pressed upon it, gradually bringing his two hands nearer to the centre. As the pillow was depressed near the middle, a long thin, and cruelly sharp spike showed itself through the cover.

Harry shuddered.

"Dat meant for yoo!" said the Malay laconically.

"I suppose he thought that would run into my temple and at least so incapacitate me that I should fall an easy victim. Thank you, Kusa! We must be careful."

It was scarcely any wonder that Harry Jarvis went about with a certain feeling of fear; although he attempted to keep his nerves braced up, he started at any unusual sound and his eyes were constantly on the move, as is usual with a man who is expecting danger at every point and watching for it. He took the precaution to have his dog with him wherever he went.

"Any news, anything fresh?" was his inquiry every time he met Kusa after an absence of an hour or so. But Kusa shook his head.

Every night the Malay examined his master's room before the latter retired and bolted his door; Kusa's sharp eyes were more likely to detect any suspicious sign or circumstance than were those of his master. But another week passed without incident.

Harry Jarvis was invited to a dinner party at the house of a local gentleman who had an idea that his daughter would make a good wife for the colonel's

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son; he accepted the invitation without guessing its object, and it was getting towards midnight before he returned.

He had his dog with him. He was not exactly fearful of an attack on his road home, but an uneasy feeling had pervaded his whole being during the evening—a feeling that something was amiss, that something was about to happen. His pre-occupation had been so marked as to call forth some sly remarks from his host, but Harry quite failed to detect the point of these little jests.

"Kusa will be sitting up for me," he murmured several times during his short walk. "Really, it will be a relief to see him, just to know what has or has not happened."

Harry let himself in and went straight to the room where he expected to find the Malay, who had a small bedroom and an outer room which served various purposes. There was a light burning in this outer room, as Harry had expected.

He opened the door and entered, softly calling "Kusa!" as he did so.

The dog ran across the floor straight to the bedroom.

There was no reply to Harry's call and the room was empty; he looked about inquiringly, and then his eyes fell on an object on the table.

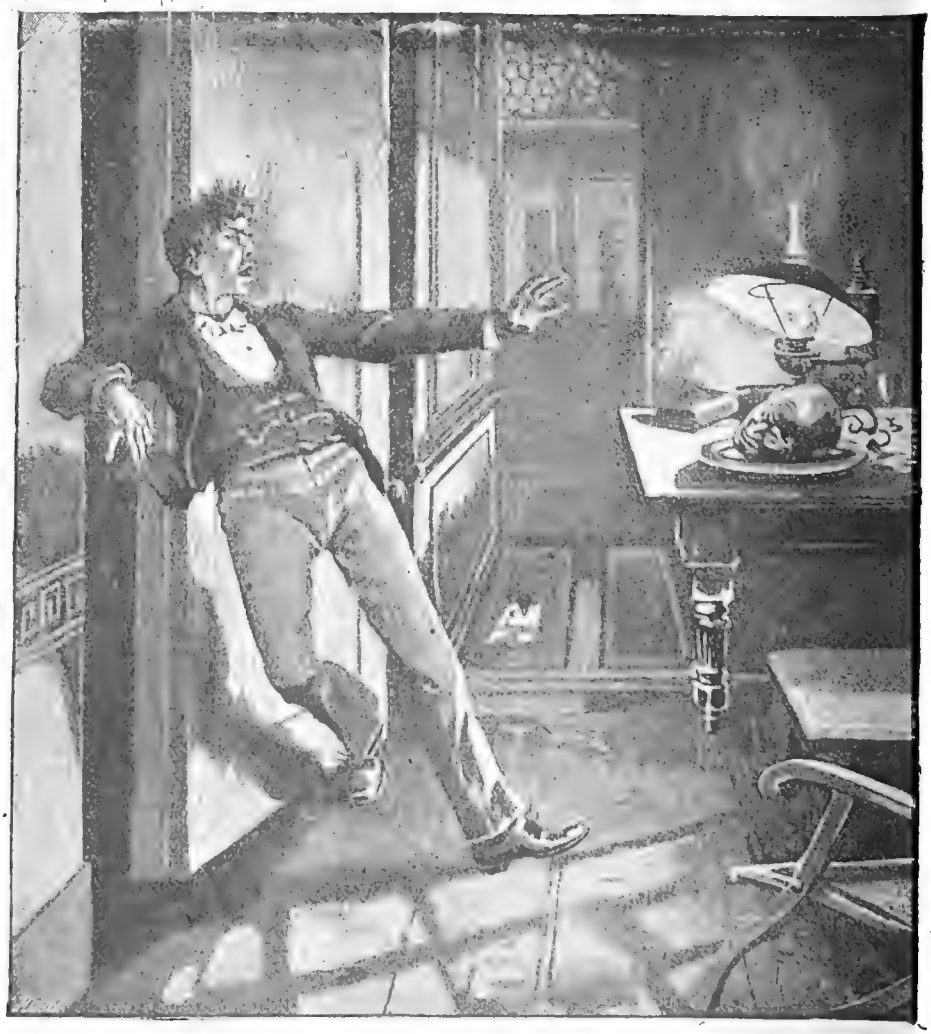
He took a step nearer in order to look at it more closely, but recoiled immediately with a cry of horror.

The ghastly object was the severed head of the Malay, lying on a dish, the shade of the lamp having been turned up so that the full light should fall on it.

Harry stood transfixed with horror and terror, scarcely able to believe the evidence of his eyes. It was too terrible to believe, too awful to think that the faithful Malay had fallen a victim to the unrelenting hatred of the Thug. But it was so, and as Harry realized it, he became aware that the dog was whining in the bedroom. He turned to make his way there, but it seemed as if he could not take his eyes from the dreadful object; fear seized upon him, he felt that the Thug must be near at hand—heavens! Perhaps behind him, standing in the open door, ready to spring on him!

By a mighty effort he nerved himself to move; he cast a swift glance around the room and then walked boldly to the other apartment. On the floor lay the headless body of his faithful servant, and the dog was whining by its side. The murder created a great stir. Harry explained the circumstances, and a hunt took place for the Thug, but he had disappeared like a thin wreath of smoke. But Harry knew the nature of the man who was so unswervingly carrying out his mission, and never relaxed his vigilance.

For a whole month there was no further indication of the mysterious Hindoo. Harry had his dog with him in his bedroom and seldom went out of the house, even if only for a walk in the grounds which surrounded the residence, without a human companion as well as his dog. But the mental strain was telling on him to such an extent that he knew it would undermine his constitution if it lasted much longer. At last, in sheer desperation, he resolved to bring matters to a crisis.



Harry stood transfixed with horror and terror.

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"I'll end it one way or the other!" he cried. "I feel that he is here, constantly watching me; I know it is so, although I cannot see him. It is his life or mine, and I will end this struggle!"

He pondered on a plan that would bring him face to face with his would-be murderer. On the whole, it seemed most probable that the bedroom might be chosen as the best point of attack if the Thug could be induced to take advantage of an opening—and he was probably on the look out for such an opportunity—he would enter the bedroom when he thought Harry was asleep. The plan, therefore, would be to give him that opening.

It was rather stange that, in spite of Harry's having made known that he was carrying the locket, the Hindoo should have entered the bedroom and broken open the case. It seemed as if he had believed Harry to be trying to throw him off the scent. Reasoning in the same way, the Thug might think he was being enticed into a trap if Harry made it known publicly that he was not taking so much precaution. It must be done as innocently as possible.

The dog was sent to a veterinary surgeon to be attended to for some complaint; the learned man undertook the care of the dog, but for the life of him he could not discover what was wrong with the animal.

Then the window required seeing to, it was not secure enough! and at the same time, the lock had to be taken off the door.

People began to think that Harry Jarvis was going wrong in his head; the workmen engaged to look to these things, could find no defects.

That night when Mr. Harry Jarvis retired to bed, the servants comprehended, despite the makeshifts, that the room was not so secure from intruders as it had been; they believed that he thought otherwise, for they did not know that this was part of his plan.

And here it may be mentioned that the only two servants in the house were men—old soldiers—as no woman would remain after the murder of Kusa.

The figure which lay in the bed that night was not the figure of Harry Jarvis; it was a dummy, made up for the occasion, while Harry secreted himself behind a curtain covering a recess in the corner.

It was a lonely vigil, full of unspeakable terrors, but the morning dawned without the quiet of the house having been disturbed. The young fellow snatched a little sleep during the day, and prepared to watch again through the night.

"He would hardly come the first night," muttered the watcher behind the curtain, "but I shall be disappointed if we do not settle accounts before to-morrow morning. This reminds me of my father's stories of those occasions when a soldier has to put his back against the wall and fight to the death."

Slowly the time passed. Harry revolved in his mind all the events of the past few weeks. What was the exact meaning of that spike in the pillow? It may have been meant to kill him outright, for it was poison, or only to render him an easy victory. But if the man followed the doctrine of his creed, he must be there to treat him (Harry) as he had treated the unfortunate Malay; and it is an undoubted fact that these strange sects are very particular in the followings of their doctrines.

How would the Thug get into the room? By the door or by the window? Harry's nerves were at their utmost tension, his sense of hearing was strained to the fullest extent, his eyes seemed ready to burst as he peered through the little opening in his endeavours to watch for the entrance of his foe. He could scarcely keep his limbs still; at one moment he fancied he heard the door being opened stealthily, and he gripped his revolver more tightly, then he started as he thought he heard a sound above his head, as though the Thug were about to drop upon him from the ceiling. Finally, his nerves were over-strained and he could perceive nothing distinctly.

Thus it came about that the curtain was suddenly pulled aside and a figure sprang upon him, full in front, without his being aware that anyone was in the room. His revolver was knocked from his hand, thin fingers fastened themselves on his throat and he was borne backwards against the wall.

He was powerless, paralysed by the sudden onslaught. The final struggle had begun in real earnest and he was worsted. He heard a voice—a fiendish voice—say something in broken English.

"Your father kill all my brothers. I kill you, like your servant. Then I kill the old sahib."

The mention of his father, the prospects of the old man also falling under the assassin's knife, acted like magic upon Harry, so small are circumstances that changed the course of our lives! His strength seemed to come back to him, he threw up his arms and clutched his adversary by the throat and they rolled over together.

The struggle was of short duration; the Hindoo was strong, and in a few seconds he had Harry underneath and was raising his knife to plunge it into his breast. Jarvis could feel, rather than see, the action and gave himself up for lost. The knife came down and struck him, but it appeared to meet with some resistance, although he felt a sharp pain.

Just at that moment he became conscious that his fingers of his right hand were touching the butt of his revolver; it was all over with him, but he might have just enough strength left to have a dying shot at his murderer, who was now relaxing his grasp under the impression that he had killed his victim.

Harry was lying quite still; he knew that he must act quickly. The hand of the Thug was now against his chin, pushing it back; like a flash he grasped the revolver, raised it and fired.

Without a sound the Hindoo rolled over and remained motionless.

* * * * *

Of course, the coroner's jury brought in a verdict of "Justifiable Homicide."

The Hindoo had been shot through the brain.

Everybody said that it was a lucky thing for Harry Jarvis that he was carrying the locket inside his waistcoat, for he would otherwise have been killed instead of receiving a mere scratch.

The locket was spoilt; as it glanced off, the knife had torn the fastening, and the blood from the wound had saturated the portrait within.

The locket was never renovated, but was placed in a box and locked up in a drawer in the iron safe. Colonel Jarvis, who had been confined to his bed for some weeks and had been kept in ignorance of what had happened, was surprised and gladdened by a visit from his son, and the news that the last of his enemies had been disposed of had the effect of hastening his recovery.

There is a tombstone in the village churchyard to mark the resting place of the faithful Kusa, and a portrait of him, painted from memory by Harry's wife hangs in the study.

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Little Beryl's Last Appearance.

A LITTLE group of stage-hands, lounging about the back-entrance of the Theatre Royal at the flourishing Midland town of Smokedale were somewhat exercised in their minds one chilly April morning, when they saw a small child, cosily wrapped in furs, emerge into the street.

She regarded the men gravely with large clear grey eyes, which shone from under a mass of golden brown hair, and seemed about to speak, when a lady—evidently a lady, in spite of the somewhat faded attire, which contrasted oddly with the smart appearance of the little girl—bade her "come along."

"Not wivout the Baroness, muvver; can't go wivout the dear Baroness," objected the child in a grave tone, and the lady, with a sigh and a smile, waited a moment for the desired companion.

That venerable peeress soon made her appearance. A fat cigar reeked in the corner of her mouth, and a brown bowler hat was cocked jauntily on the side of her head.

She was, in fact, none other than Mr. Frank Bates, comedian, who sustained the part of the Baroness in the new light opera "The Chimes of Charleroi," in a manner replete with genuine humour untainted with the least suspicion of vulgarity. At least, so the papers said, and their opinion was cordially supported by Mr. Bates in his own person.

"Morning, Mrs. Tracy; morning Beryl, dear," cried the comedian, removing the jaunty brown bowler with a flourish, and stuffing a big bundle of unopened letters, just received from the stage-doorkeeper, into his overcoat pocket. "Ready to go before the beak—eh? I expect," he continued gravely, "they'll only give you six months in consideration of your youth."

Beryl regarded him with grave disdain.

"Have you got an orange?" she demanded, coming straight to the point in the fearless fashion of childhood.

"Shouldn't wonder if I had," rejoined Bates cheerily; and the golden fruit was soon forthcoming from the depths of the overcoat pocket. Then, with Mrs. Tracy on one hand, and the comedian on the other, Beryl set forth on the way to the Smokedale Police Court.

Mr. Charlton's opera company was a touring one, playing perhaps a fortnight in each town, or three weeks if houses ruled large, and no date was booked at another theatre.

The sage provisions of the law regarding the employment of children on the stage, provided that a fresh license to play had to be obtained for Beryl Tracy (or "Little Beryl, the Most Marvellous Child Actress of the Age,") in every town visited. By this time Beryl was used to the formality, and, backed by her mother and the faithful Baroness, regarded Bench, clerk, and policeman with no sort of awe.

The thin, pale, aristocratic features of Mrs. Tracy, the bright, pretty child, and the cheery twinkle in the eye of Mr. Bates, produced their usual impression in the breast of the burly constable keeping the door of the Smokedale Police Court, and he bent forward with an expression of interest on his broad, red face.

"What business, ma'am?" he inquired in a hoarse whisper.

Mrs. Tracy explained.

"There's 'ardly anyone at the solicitor's table," the policeman said, peering into the court. "I should set there if I was you, ma'am. It'll be more comfortable for you. There ain't much business this morning, so you won't 'ave to wait long."

Accordingly, at the solicitor's table, viewed with languid curiosity by the clerk and one sleepy lawyer's boy, mother and child took their seats. Bates, with the expansiveness of his tribe, lingered to chat with the friendly constable.

"You're unlucky this morning," remarked the guardian of the peace.

"How so?"

"Adisham's on the Bench. Not that there'll be any trouble, 'ceptin' he might pass a few hasty remarks," the constable hastened to add.

"Who's Adisham?" inquired Bates.

"'Ates theatres—and actresses. My word!—like poison!" the constable explained.

"Nice cup o' tea he must be."

"Used to be a rare one for theatres about ten years ago. Was at the Royalty or the Comedy nearly every night," went on the constable, folding his arms, setting his back against the door, and evidently enjoying a chat with the comedian. "'Ates 'em now."

"You don't say so! What for?"

"Dunno. Some say that he was mashed on a actress wot jilted him, but there's no knowing. Any'ow, 'e 'asn't been seen in a theatre in this town for ten years or more—that's a certain fact."

"And what might this sportsman be when he's at home?" inquired Bates.

"Brassfounder. Pots o' money."

"Ha!" said the comedian, brightly, "just the sort of Johnnie to take tickets for my benefit."

And with a pleasant nod to the policeman, he passed into the court.

Fog was filling the room; the frowsy idlers on the back benches could hardly be distinguished. There were three magistrates on the Bench; a rosy-faced, white-haired old man with an air of mild good nature, a square-faced, determined-looking, middle-aged one, with bushy black whiskers and thin lips, and a third, apparently younger than the other two, so far as his face could be distinguished. With elbow on the desk in front of him, however, he contrived to shield his face with a white, well-kept hand, on which was a massive signet-ring which glittered under the electric light. The comedian slid into a seat beside Beryl, who surreptitiously patted her Baroness' hand beneath the table.

"Muvver's looked so ill since we've been here," she whispered. "I was afraid she would faint."

Bates shot a glance at Mrs. Tracy. Her eyes were cast down, her thin, high-bred face absolutely bloodless, her lips tightly compressed. She felt the comedian's eyes upon her, however, and flashed him a sad smile.

In the dock a broken-nosed person in a red muffler was being asked to explain his possession of a clock and

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a pair of vases, supposed to have been stolen. Hoarsely he protested that the articles had been given to him in a public-house by a man he did not know. However, this simple and straightforward explanation was but coldly received, and his remand for inquiries concluded the police-business of the day.

Mrs. Tracy's application was taken next, Bates, as stage-manager, representing Mr. Charlton.

"Stand up, my dear," said the rosy-faced old man in his mild way to Beryl. The other two magistrates seemed to have lost all interest in the proceedings. He with the black whiskers leant back with folded arms and stared at the ceiling. The youngest magistrate did not move. A series of the usual questions was put to the child Beryl.

"Did she like her work—hey? What time did she go to bed—hey? Did she do lessons—hey? Who taught her—hey?" and to all these queries Miss Beryl with great self-possession returned appropriate answers. The application was soon granted, and the clerk signed to Mrs. Tracy's party to go.

"One moment," said the youngest magistrate. He leant over his desk, his arms folded, and fixed his eyes on Beryl. It was a strong, stern face that the electric-light stare on, with lines of suffering about the eyes and close-shaven lips.

"Where is your father?" said Adisham, abruptly.

There was momentary silence, only broken by a quick in-drawing of the breath from Mrs. Tracy. The rosy-faced old man looked with mild curiosity at his colleague.

"I have no father," said Beryl in her clear voice.

A murmur ran through the crowded court. Adisham sank back with a pallid face, the lines deepening round his firm mouth. Mrs. Tracy gave a little moan and seemed about to faint. In a few moments the faithful Bates had her out of court into the fresh, cold air.

"Cruel, cruel!" she murmured almost wildly as they passed through the doors.

The same night the piece vivaciously ran its course before a delighted audience. The Baroness had just responded to the third encore for her great song, "Oh! if Her Mother Only Knew," when a figure, totally unfamiliar to the *habitués* of the Royal, slipped into a stall in the back row. It was George Adisham. His intimates would have been considerably astonished to see this hater of the stage and its professors in this situation, but no words could describe their state of mind had they descried him after the performance loitering up and down outside the stage door like a stage-struck junior clerk from his own counting-house.

His cigar was about half-smoked, when Mrs. Tracy, Beryl, and the Baroness came out.

"Dora!" he said in his deep voice. His face was ghastly in the dim light of the stage-door lamp.

"George, is it you?"

Beryl seized the comedian's hand. Her mother turned to her.

"Go on in front, dear, with Mr. Bates. I—I have to talk to Mr. Adisham."

Half-an-hour later, Beryl safely in bed, Adisham and Mrs. Tracy held low-toned converse in the sitting-room of the lodgings.

"So—he is dead," said the man.

"Yes, I have been a widow for eighteen months," replied Dora quietly.

"*De mortuis*—" said Adisham with a bitter smile.

"Hush!" interrupted the woman quickly, a faint flush staining her pale face. "He was good to me—he——"

She lied bravely, as women will; but Adisham's keen eyes made her defence of her dead blackguard of no avail. She dropped her own before his searching gaze.

"Let us forgive the dead. They cannot defend themselves," she said gently.

"I will forgive him," said Adisham, almost fiercely. His eyes glittered. "He stole you from me—Rupert Tracy, the handsome actor all the girls were in love with! He stole you from me—I tell you, for you were mine once—with his practised arts. But he has made amends."

He stopped, panting.

Mrs. Tracy sighed with a weary air.

"Have you only come here to abuse my dead husband?" she asked icily.

He sprang to her and caught her two cold hands in his.

"Forgive me, Dora," he murmured. "Imagine what my life has been this ten years. Is it very strange that I should feel hard to him?"

His burning eyes were fixed upon her. She did not withdraw her hands, but looked him squarely in the eyes. What she said then no one knows; but there were no more words. Her head drooped, she bent nearer to him, and nearer still, till his arms slid round her and held her close to his faithful heart.

* * * * *

Mr. Charles Charlton declared that his tenderest feelings had been outraged when Mr. Adisham insisted on Beryl breaking her contract there and then; but the forfeit he demanded was cheerfully paid, and the night that Mrs. Tracy promised to marry her old sweetheart saw "Little Beryl's" last appearance.

Your Editor as a Prize.

He will give himself to the girl who most takes his fancy. . . . . .

In the Whitsuntide Number of "SHORT STORIES" (published Saturday before Bank Holiday) you will find particulars of this amazing scheme. . . .

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Tell your single girl friends about this scheme

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A Maid of Muscovy

Down Wapping way there is a certain old public-house by the riverside, known by the sign of the "Red Admiral." It is approached from the land side by a narrow, evil-smelling alley-way, leading out of the main street of the district. The rear of the premises are weather boarded (once black, but now grey with age), and overhang the water in crazy fashion, so that the occupants of this part of the house might almost fancy themselves afloat in more senses than one.

It was a house of no great reputation, for the matter of that, of very small credit indeed, nowadays being used principally by a shady, shifty class of customer. Formerly it had been a popular house of call for watermen, but watermen are in this year of grace a decayed fraternity, and so "The Red Admiral" has decayed, too, becoming decrepit, disreputable; at once an eyesore and a nuisance.

It was at this time kept by one Eli Shackleton, an old man with one son, a precious young rascal, who robbed his father on every conceivable opportunity, and only waited his chance to make as sufficient a haul as should enable him to show the place a clean pair of heels.

Eli was himself a bit of a rough character, but age and a not too limited devotion to his own wares had sensibly affected his bodily and mental powers.

Young Sam, therefore, had a fairly free run, and took good care to avail himself of every advantage the fact gave him.

There was one peculiarity connected with the old "public," in that from time to time it was visited by certain Russian immigrants, who by the production of credentials, generally in the shape of dirty, illegibly-inscribed scraps of paper, established friendly relations with the proprietor.

In his early days Eli had been a mariner, in the Baltic trade; hence his connection with Russian interests; but, of the actual nature of the bond between himself and his mysterious visitors nothing can be said, because nothing was greatly known.

His son never rested in his endeavours to penetrate the mystery, but in this, his father was more than a match for him, and the thing so far as he was concerned remained a mystery still.

On a murky, dismally-cold November evening in the year —88 the *Nijni Novgorod*, from St. Petersburg, steamed slowly up the river to her berth in the Pool, nearly opposite to "The Red Admiral."

There were always two or three wherries, ancient, ill-found and filthily dirty, at the foot of the slimy, rotten wooden steps that formed the river end of the alley-way. Their owners were more often than not in the bar of the public-house, but on this particular occasion one of them, an old man, sat hunched up in his boat, blinkily looking for the custom that seemed so long in coming.

A hail from the deck of the Russian steamer as she swung to her moorings, advised him of the prospect of a job, and, pushing out into the stream, he sculled, as fast as his withered, sapless old arms would allow him, in the direction of the ship.

At the gangway stood a young girl, of fifteen or thereabouts. Dark, expressive eyes, a sallow complexion, and hair hanging in two long plaits over her shoulders, proclaimed her Slav, while her every now and then vivacious chatter to a tall, grey-bearded, long-cloaked man immediately behind her, testified to her brightness of disposition.

The transfer of the couple, with their modest impedimenta, to the wherry, did not take long, and within a few minutes father and daughter, as they undoubtedly were, were safely bestowed in the inner parlour of "The Red Admiral."

Young Sam was not at home when they arrived, but on his return set himself to ferreting out the why and the wherefore of things. That he was unsuccessful is no reason why the reader should not be enlightened.

Georges Petrovitch had been implicated in the murder of the Czar Alexander II., and had been in hiding during the years that had elapsed since that event, despite every effort on the part of the Russian authorities to discover his whereabouts.

An opportunity having arisen, enabling him, and his daughter Olga, to join the *Nijni Novgorod* at a point off the Crimean Coast remote from the ken of the government spies, he seized it, though effecting his purpose only in the teeth of the greatest difficulty and danger.

Olga was quite ignorant of her father's share in the events of that fatal year, looking up to him with the utmost love and reverence. At times she had noticed his gloominess of manner, and wondered at it, but with Petrovitch such fits were rare and did not last long, so that she soon ceased to be exercised in mind, and laughed and chattered as aforetime.

Georges Petrovitch was possessed with no feeling of remorse or compunction with regard to his participation in the crime. He honestly believed the deed to have been necessary, his creed being the sacrifice of the few for the good of the many.

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Old Eli and himself were closeted for an hour or two; their deliberations, whatever their import, being strictly confined to themselves. Possibly it concerned the mere future settlement in London of Petrovitch and his daughter, the landlord of "The Red Admiral" having an intimate knowledge of all the likely places in the foreign colony of the metropolis.

Anyway, the pair remained as guests for more than a week, and it was only an incident that occurred on the night of the tenth day which determined the visit, and resulted in the somewhat premature departure of Olga and her father.

Opening out of the back of the bar was a room used more for the storing of lumber and material needed in the business, than for domestic comfort. Here was a small safe let into the wall, the key of which old Eli invariably carried about with him. There was another entrance into this room by a door from a passage, running the depth of the house. This door had two small squares of glass in its upper panels, enabling anyone outside to see within the apartment.

On the night in question, Olga, who slept in the room immediately over this one, was restless and wakeful. Young Sam had gone out early in the evening, and so far as she knew had not returned.

It was some time past midnight when she heard a noise as of someone moving about in the room below. She had not undressed, and being by nature a courageous little soul, she quietly opened the door and crept noiselessly down the stairway.

Arrived at the foot she paused at the door leading into the bar-parlour, through the glass in which came a soft light, and, raising herself on tip-toe, peeped into the room.

What she saw frightened her for the moment. A man with his back to her was investig ting the contents of the safe, the door of which had evidently been forced open. The thief half-turned his head, and Olga recognised him.

Young Sam, for it was he, had just removed a large cashbox, and was in the act of placing it on the table for examination, when Olga, rapidly opening the door, made two steps forward and placed her hand upon it.

Astounded at such an apparition, with an oath Sam Shackleton turned upon the girl.

"Leave go! what's it to do with you? If you don't leave go, I'll smash you!"

"You've no right to it, it is your father's," she said quietly in broken English. "I will take care of it till the morning, and will then give it to him."

She made to do as she had said, but the young ruffian was too quick for her.

Snatching the box from under her hand, he thrust her away savagely, so that she fell to the ground; as she did so, her forehead struck violently the edge of the table.

Young Sam, pausing an instant only to pick up the box, which had fallen in the scuffle, and to cast a half-malignant, half-terrified glance at Olga, who lay white and still, on her brow a wound, perilously near the right temple, turned and fled.

Leaping the counter, and shooting the bolts of the front door, he disappeared into the night, leaving the door open behind him.

* * * * *

It is ten years since Georges Petrovitch and Olga landed on British soil. Their life has been uneventful during all this while. There is but one thing which troubles the girl, now a fine, handsome young woman of stately presence, and with the air of a princess. Petrovitch, regularly on the Thursday evening in each week, leaves the little home in Dean Street, Soho, over the restaurateur's, to be absent until the small hours of the next day.

Where he goes, and upon what errand, she is profoundly ignorant, but there is just a suspicion in her

At the gangway stood a young girl of fifteen or thereabouts.

mind of the truth—that politics, Russian politics, are at the bottom of it. Still, she is far from being certain, and the uncertainty makes her unhappy and wretchedly anxious.

It is on one of these periodical occasions that she is told a gentleman desires to see her. Petrovitch has been gone but a few minutes, and she is therefore alone. Knowing no one of the opposite sex who would be likely to call upon her in this way, and at this house, she naturally hesitates before admitting the visitor. He, however, has followed hard on the footsteps of the little Swiss serving maiden.

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"Pardon me," he says, hat in hand, and standing in the doorway, "but I wish to claim the privilege of an old acquaintance."

Olga looks at him in bewildered astonishment. A burly man of middle height, with sandy hair, and beard and whiskers close-trimmed, his personality recalls no memories to her. Small eyes, and an odd trick of looking furtively from under the lids, are not a pleasant characteristic, and it is this which eventually sets her thinking.

Meanwhile the individual has, unasked, taken a chair.

"Am I so altered, then?" he continued, a peculiar smile accentuating the query.

"I cannot say, because I have no recollection of you."

"No?—that is hardly complimentary. I think at one time, some years ago, you and your father were guests of ours at 'The Red Admiral.'"

Olga started up in intense agitation, while the man thought how beautiful her indignation (and she was indignant) made her.

"You!" she said. "You!—How dare you!—Go away! It is only some wickedness that has brought you here. We do not want to know you! Go away! There are those here who will protect me."

"Hoity-toity! this is a fine welcome to an old friend."

"Friend! *that* you never were—to me!—Do you see this?—this, Sam Shackleton?" and she put back the hair from her forehead, upon which, just above the right temple, a long dark red scar plainly showed itself. "Do you see this? and do you think that the man who struck the blow can ever be friend of mine? Go away!—and never dare to repeat this insult."

Her contemptuous loathing stung him at last; and the coarse brutal nature of the man broke through the very thin veneer of conventional respectability.

"Very well, my lady, very well," he said, his voice thick and his face crimson with passion, "I'd have been a good friend to you."

"You!" she interrupted him scornfully.

"Yes, I would. You don't know, perhaps, that I've come back from Kimberley a more than rich man? I could hang diamonds on every square inch of you. When I saw you the other day in the street, I said to myself that I'd give you a chance to wear 'em. It's your own fault if you won't. But look out, both of you; especially that precious father of yours. Maybe I know more than you think. Anyway, look out. Sam Shackleton is no fool, and doesn't go about with his eyes shut."

Putting on his hat, he opened the door, looked meaningly at her as she still stood on the other side of the table, with her one hand resting upon it, and went out.

For some reason or other Olga did not tell her father of Sam Shackleton's visit. Much to her relief it was not repeated.

When, however, on the following Thursday evening Petrovitch made to depart upon his usual weekly expedition, she seemed more than ordinarily anxious, and, although her father pooh-pooh'd her fears for him, and would not be persuaded to forego his engagement, she saw him leave, with a heavy heart.

Petrovitch was a little lame, and walked but slowly. Swiftly, as the door closed behind him, Olga put on on her hat and jacket, and flew down the stairs into the street. She saw him but a few yards ahead of her, and, keeping well out of sight followed hard after him.

Through a small lane into Frith Street, and so, by way of Old Compton Street, into a narrow, paved thoroughfare for foot passengers only.

Here, when about halfway through, the old man stopped at the private door of a small tobacconist's shop.

Giving five distinct knocks, the door was opened, and, he disappearing inside, was quickly closed again.

Rapidly making a mental note of the house, and the name, a Russian one, over the shop, Olga walked away as if her life depended upon it, in the direction of Oxford Street. From here into Regent Street, and thence, having crossed it, up one of the small streets which run off to the right near the Queen's Hall.

At a certain house, a large brass door-plate announced that "Henry James Day, Solicitor" had his office and dwelling there.

Olga knocked and rang, and, there being no immediate response, knocked and rang again.

"Mr. Day! is he in?" she panted out to the girl who answered her summons,

"Yes, Miss" (she knew Olga well). "Will you come in?"

But other ears had heard the inquiry. Out of the room on the left of the hall, came a tall young fellow of about thirty-one or two.

"Olga! and at this time of night! What's the matter, dear? Why, your hands are like ice! Jennie! tell your mother to get some hot coffee for Miss Olga directly."

"Oh! Harry! never mind me now. I want you to come and help me! Father is in danger, I am sure of it!"

And then she told him all about Sam Shackleton's visit, and his threats of what he could and would do.

Henry Day was rather inclined to make light of the matter, being far more disposed to anger with regard to the insult offered to his sweetheart.

He had won her, as it were, at the sword's point when, three years before, he had championed her cause late one night as on her way home, she had been grossly molested by some well-dressed scoundrel.

"My dear girl! I'll come, of course, if it will ease your mind; but as it's only surmise on your part I expect that you'll find you're worrying your poor little head for nothing."

"There's a dear!" she pleaded, "come! Come now, will you?"

"Very well! we'll start at once."

* * * * *

On the afternoon of the day of Sam Shackleton's unwelcome visit to Olga two men met about three o'clock outside "The Horseshoe," in Tottenham Court Road.

"And you know! You have seen him—Georges Petrovitch—go into and come out of this house?"

"Yes, yes! I tell you! Why, last night I waited outside from just before midnight till four this morning, and—then I saw him!"

The first speaker was evidently a foreigner, quiet, restrained, and not at all familiar in his manner towards his companion.

There was an air of officialism about him—the keen alertness of eye and feature, the "strong" look proclaimed it. The other was Sam Shackleton.

"Ah!" said the Russian, as his next words showed him to be, "when you called at Chesham Place early last evening, you told the Count, I believe, that you were then going on to this club. Now, I have further instructions for you from His Excellency the Ambassador."

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"Instructions! me!"

"Yes! you. You will go on Thursday evening next with a form of introduction (to be furnished you by us), to this club. You will be admitted a member; and—you will tell us the rest."

"I'll see you hanged first! Go yourself! Do your own dirty work!"

"Come! come now! will you?"

"No, I am known to these men. I cannot. You will go."

Sam Shackleton was a coward, as we know, and he was, in spite of himself, powerless to kick against the pricks.

"Well," he said, sullenly, "suppose I agree to go, what then; where do you come in?"

"That is my—is our business," quietly and imperturbably rejoined the other.

"Shall you be within hail?" asked Sam.

"Perhaps."

"No, but will you—will you?"

"But why do you ask, my good Monsieur Shackleton?—you are not afraid!—you are—what you call—hero! eh?"

"Get out!" replied Sam, savagely.

"But yes! tell me; what is your motive? Is it that you hate this Georges Petrovitch?"

"Yes!—yes!—I hate him! and—and—her. I hate them both!"

"Ah! I thought so!—well; that is your affair—Our business is to trap the murderer of the Czar—lure him, if possible to the river, and then——" (The agent shrugged his shoulders, and gave a quiet smile.) "Then George Petrovitch will start on his journey to join his comrades in the 'Happy Valley'—*Voilà.*"

"You shall—you shall," hissed Sam.

"Good," replied the police spy, "you will hear of or see me on Thursday night some time. Meanwhile, *au revoir, mon ami.*"

He turned abruptly, and crossing Oxford Street, was speedily lost in the purlieus of Soho.

Sam stood a moment looking uneasily after him, and then followed slowly in the same direction.

* * * * *

In less than half-an-hour, Harry Day and Olga were standing in front of the tobacconist's shop.

On the way, Olga had instructed him how to proceed. Accordingly, he gave the orthodox five raps, and waited results.

Hardly had the sound of the last rap died away when the door was flung violently open, and a man—coatless, hatless, his shirt torn, and spotted here and there with blood, his face white and terrified-looking—was thrust out, as by invisible hands, right into the young lawyer's arms, and the door banged to again.

"Hullo! what's the matter, man?" said Harry, supporting his burden as best he could.

"I'll hang 'em!—hang 'em all! They're all devils!—devils!" shrieked the wretched object. "They've nearly murdered me! Fetch the police; I know what'll hang 'em!"

"Quietly—quietly," replied Harry.

At this moment an inspector of police and two constables came up and proceeded to investigate.

"Your name, sir," said the inspector to the man.

"Samuel Shackleton, stopping at the 'Cecil.'"

"What do you complain of?"

"There is an illegal club in there! They're Nihilists—murderers! They've nearly done for me!"

"What were you doing there?"

"That's my business."

"Then you must manage it yourself. We've had no complaint of the house; and you'd better get into a cab and go back to the Cecil."

A man in sober grey had been quietly listening to this short colloquy, and now came forward, placing his hand on Shackleton's shoulder.

"Samuel Shackleton," he said; "I hold a warrant, issued by the Chief Magistrate of Cape Town, Cape Colony, for your arrest, on a charge of stealing from one Otto Greenbaum, of that place, diamonds to the value of £70,000."

* * * * *

With Sam Shackleton's arrest and subsequent consignment to penal servitude for twenty years, the troubles of Olga and her father faded away into the quiet happiness that they had known before Sam Shackleton's re-appearance.

Harry and his sweetheart are married now, and the name that he loves best to call her is—just that—his sweetheart; whereat she only puts her finger upon his lips, and says:

"Foolish fellow!"

RALPH ENDERBY.

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THE FATE OF MICHAEL STANDRIDGE

By HEADON HILL.

Author of "The Peril of the Prince," "Seaward for the Foe," "Guilty Gold," etc.

SUMMARY.

THE steamship *Trojan* is homeward bound from the Cape. On board is Michael Standridge, who is returning to England from the Kimberley diamond fields, in possession of the "Kimberley Elephant," the largest diamond found in the colony. On the ship is his half-brother, Simon Hoathley. On the way up the English Channel the latter steals into the miner's cabin with the intention of murdering him and obtaining possession of the diamond. The miner, however, is on the alert, and presents a pistol at the intruder's head.

Michael sells his diamond for £20,000 to Messrs. Strauss and Lightfoot, whose clerk, Swinley Tasker, he discovers in an attempt to rob him of £35. Michael reads Tasker a lecture, kicks him, and departs—having made an enemy of this rascal. Reading is where Michael expects to find news of his daughter, and he purchases Kennett's Cross, a dilapidated farmhouse in the neighbourhood, this house meeting his requirements by being very secluded, and on a clay soil suitable for brickmaking.

He spends his time in making bricks, and as each batch is made he draws out from the bank a thousand pounds in gold, until at length his balance is quite low. One day Michael is thrown out of his pony-trap, and enters a house for assistance. Here he finds Cuthbert Blakesley, the cashier at the bank, and two ladies, and recognises in the younger one, to whom Cuthbert is engaged to be married, a strong resemblance to his wife.

Mrs. Bonfield is able to prove that Marion is Michael's daughter, and he promises to acquaint her shortly with the secret of Kennett's Cross. A few weeks later Marion and Cuthbert are sitting in the garden, waiting for her father, when a constable enters and arrests Cuthbert on the charge of murdering Michael.

At the inquest which follows strong evidence against Cuthbert is given. The latter also makes a statement. The verdict is one of "Wilful murder against Cuthbert Blakesley."

CHAPTER VIII. (*continued*).

"You are not about to leave us, I hope—not going to desert the neighbourhood altogether?" said Mr. Oakley, in some surprise at the only alternative that presented itself to him.

"No, indeed," replied Marion, half-smiling at the idea that she would turn her back on the place while Cuthbert was there and in trouble. "I was thinking that as Kennett's Cross was my father's home, and he has left it to me, I might go and live there for a time."

"What, in that lonely farmhouse, with all its recent and horrible associations! My dear young lady, you cannot be serious, or else you have not realized what your proposition entails!" exclaimed the manager, hardly believing that he had heard aright.

Marion quickly undeceived him. "I am not a nervous girl," she said firmly. "There is no reason why I should be afraid to live there now that all that was worth a robber's visit has been taken."

"But the place is old and out of repair—only one or two of the rooms are furnished," persisted Mr. Oakley.

"What was good enough for my father is good enough for me," returned Marion. "Do not, please, throw obstacles in my way," she went on pleadingly. "Why should I fritter away my slender resources in lodging expenses when I can save by living in a house of my own rent free? By my plan I can make the remnant of my father's money last for quite a long time, and surely it would be wrong in my place to spend unnecessarily."

She did not add that she wanted to economize in order to use as much of her money as might be needed in securing skilled assistance for Cuthbert, and that her "plan" arose in the first instance from an idea that on the scene of the crime she might effectually aid the defence. Though she had not yet finally decided how to set to work, Zambra and his achievements had been perpetually in her mind during the last two days, and her first thought on leaving "The Limes" had been that she would now be free to consult him, should she so elect, when and where she pleased.

In his prim regard for the conventional, Mr. Oakley held out for a good quarter of an hour, doing all he could to induce her to remain in the town, and when that failed he offered to go to Mrs. Bonfield and endeavour to bring her to a more charitable frame of mind, so that a return to "The Limes" would be possible. But that Marion would not hear of; her new-found independence was too valuable to be lightly yielded, and she remained resolute to her purpose, with the result that the manager gave in at last—"under protest," as he put it, and in the full expectation that a day or two of the solitary old house would drive her back to Reading.

"You will be bringing it here again within the week, with a request to find you a tenant," he said, as he handed her the clumsy key of her new abode.

Having gained her point, Marion engaged a fly to take her to her destination, and on her way stopped at "The Limes" to pick up the few things she had packed. The servant who brought them out said that she had been charged by her mistress to inquire where Miss Standridge was going to reside in future—a mode of expression that scarcely implied any present intention to retract.

"You can tell Mrs. Bonfield that I hope she will think as kindly of me as I do of her," was the reply. "I have adopted her suggestion, and am going to Kennett's Cross."

The woman stared with astonishment, and then retired with the message as Marion signed to the coachman to proceed. The carriage had not turned through the gates into the road, when the sounds of an "hysterical attack" in the house proclaimed the manner in which the emotional

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old woman had received the news and it was probably owing to the regretful feelings called up in the girl's mind by the wild weeping and laughter that she failed to notice a man who was lounging about outside the gates. He was an elderly man; a yellow-skinned, dissipated-looking man in black; a man with one cunning eye that sent twinkling glances after the carriage, while its fellow shone with a steady gleam in the direction of "The Limes."

"I wonder if that was her—and where she was going," he muttered to himself as he turned away towards Reading. "There seems to be someone ill or crazy in the house, and in any case I think I will postpone making my dear niece's acquaintance till to-morrow. I can burrow about a bit in the town to-night."

CHAPTER IX.

"UNCLE SIMON."

THUS it was that Marion found herself that same evening standing at the gate in the lane with the key of Kennett's Cross in her hand. She was quite alone; and as the Reading fly which had brought her drove away she could not but feel her loneliness—the deserted house loomed up so dark and grim in the grey twilight, seeming all the more gloomy from its recent associations.

But a large share of her father's adventurous spirit had fallen to the girl, and she consoled herself with the knowledge that she was not worth robbing. Surely with the disappearance of the supposed hoard Kennett's Cross must have ceased to be a centre of attraction to evil doers.

The funeral had taken place on the preceding day, and at the same time the police who had been in possession had been withdrawn, Inspector Dimmock having ransacked every hole and corner of the grounds in his endeavours to find the missing gold.

Mr. Oakley, as the dead man's representative, had had the place put to rights after the funeral, and Marion established herself in the front sitting-room, where her father had met his end. She deferred her exploration of the house till daylight should come to her aid, merely taking a look at the bedroom overhead, in which, as it was the only one furnished, she would have to pass the night. This done she set about making herself comfortable in a methodical way. She had brought some provisions with her, and was soon able to sit down to her first meal under her own roof.

It must not be thought that Marion was heartless because, even on the scene of the crime, she thought less of the deed that had deprived her of a father who was almost a stranger than of the terrible danger which menaced her lover. Marion, from her earliest years, from having to be hands and head to a silly old woman, had developed a matter-of-fact and self-reliant nature which in her present circumstances, was roused into full play, and she meant to devote herself rather to saving the living than to mourning for the dead. It would be time enough to render honour to her father's memory, she thought, when his murderer was in the hands of justice and Cuthbert was free.

When she had finished her tea, she drew a card from her pocket, and sat for a long time gazing abstractedly at an address which she had pencilled on the back, thus:

SEBASTIAN ZAMBRA.
300, Chandos Street,
Strand, W.C.

"I feel that I must have help, and now that I am my own mistress there is nothing to hinder," said Marion to herself at last. "I am glad I was so interested in the case when I read it in the *Standard*, that I made a note of the address, thinking that some day I might ask him to find my father. Zambra can be no common detective—common detectives are fools," she interpolated, with angry thoughts of Dimmock. "This man must have brains enough to look deeper than first appearances, and at least he will be on our side if I employ him."

She got up and paced the room excitedly, trying to come to a decision as how best to help in Cuthbert's defence. In her course she had to pass between the table and the mantelpiece, and so it happened that in her engrossment she turned too sharply, and with her sleeve dislodged a brown earthenware tobacco jar that was standing at the end of the shelf. The jar fell clattering on to the floor, but it was not broken. All the harm that was done was that the contents, about two ounces of coarse-cut cavendish tobacco and a wedge of doubled paper, were scattered about on the carpet.

Marion for the moment was grieved by an accident which reminded her so abruptly of her father's recent presence in the room, but, recovering herself, she stopped to replace the tobacco in the jar. She also gathered up the wedge of paper which she supposed had been used as an improvised "damper" to keep the contents of the jar moist and fresh. She was about to restore this also to its place, when a sudden impulse seized her to unfold it first. As she did so a cry of horror escaped her lips. The inside of the paper disclosed a dark red stain, exactly of the shape of a knife-blade, suggesting at once that it had been used by the murderer to wipe the fatal weapon.

Again a startled exclamation was forced from the trembling girl, when she saw that the paper was nothing more nor less than an envelope addressed to Cuthbert Blakesly at the Reading Bank, in the handwriting which the events of the previous week had familiarized her with as that of Michael Standridge.

Overcome by her discovery, Marion sank into the one armchair in the room, and tried, for her lover's sake, to collect her thoughts. After a little while she mastered her repulsion and examined the envelope more closely. It had passed through the post, and bore the dating stamp of the Wilmington rural sub-office, which was the nearest to Kennett's Cross. The date, May 9th, showed Marion at once that it was the missing envelope of the letter mentioned by Cuthbert at the inquest as having brought him to the house that night.

"This decides me," she said to herself. "Zambra must tell me what this means. Cuthbert relied so on that letter, as proving that it was not he who sought the interview, and this envelope should corroborate his story. And yet, that awful mark upon it! How can I unaided say if this chance of mine is for him or against him? I dare not produce the envelope till I know, and Zambra is the man to read between the lines. I will send to him in the morning."

Her mind once made up, she grew calmer. After carefully putting away the envelope in the bosom of her dress, she sat far into the night, jotting down every scrap of information her father had given her about his past life. It was very brief and very disconnected, and chiefly related to his adventures in foreign lands; but such as it was she noted every item as it occurred to her, in the hope that this Zambra of whom she had read might pick out somewhere from the mass of trifles a hidden clue. In her mental effort to remember every word that her father had said to her she forgot her solitude and escaped the nervousness which, well-braced, healthy girl as she was, on the first evening in that house might well overcome her. It was long past midnight when she went up the worm-eaten old staircase to bed, still so full of her task that the silence and the shadows had no terrors for her.

In the morning Marion woke betimes, and after an early breakfast walked into the village of Wilmington, whence she telegraphed to the address she had pencilled on the card, merely inquiring if Mr. Zambra would undertake the Kennett's Cross case in the interest of the relatives; and, if so, when he might be expected. To save time she waited about in the village till the answer came thus: "Certainly. Will be with you to-morrow early; engagement prevents to-day." Satisfied with her morning's work, Marion took the opportunity to make a few necessary purchases, and then made the best of her way back to explore the old house from end to end.

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She was very thorough in everything she did. Commencing with the ground floor, she made herself familiar with the great kitchen, the disused sitting-room, and with the quaint nooks and crannies of store-rooms behind the dairy, whence the rats scampered at her approach. Mr. Oakley had given her the key of the strong-room, but so much of the mystery of her father's death seemed to centre in the recesses of the cellar that she preferred to wait until she could examine it in Zambra's company. Beyond the few utensils which Michael's simply cookery had demanded, and the lumber in the second parlour, there was no signs of recent occupation anywhere outside the sitting-room—an air of mouldy desolation was over everything.

In the same way Marion went through the upstairs apartments, room by room, without finding traces of human presence anywhere but in her father's bedroom—now her own—and in a small empty chamber at the end of a passage, where the police had removed a plank from the floor to find the key.

The plank had not been replaced, but was still lying close to the aperture caused by its removal. Marion looked in and shuddered as there rose vividly before her mind's eye the picture of a felonious hand, fresh from the darker crime below, fumbling in the dusty hole in the dead of night. In the other rooms—small, low-ceiled chambers they were—there was nothing remarkable save the all-pervading emptiness.

Marion returned to her sitting-room, and after a little rest and refreshment went out into the wilderness of garden ground, and thence down to the upturned paddock, where she viewed with wonder the evidences of Michael's labour. The police, under orders from Inspector Dimmock, had increased the confusion of the scene by scattering Michael's neatly-stacked heaps of clay, and by demolishing the kiln in their search for the missing gold. Marion also looked into the empty stable, whence the pony had been removed by Mr. Oakley's orders to be sold for the benefit of the estate. Here, too, all was chaos, the very manger having been wrenched away by the persistent Dimmock.

The girl went back to the house listlessly. Now that she had seen all that there was to be seen time began to hang heavily on her hands, and she grew impatient for the morrow which should bring the detective. It was past five o'clock when she settled down in the parlour again to busy herself with preparations for a solitary woman's principal luxury—her cup of afternoon tea. She was trying to induce Michael's old camp kettle to boil when suddenly there came over her the feeling that someone was looking at her. Turning instinctively, she saw that the gaze she had felt came from a person who was standing outside the window, on the garden path, peering into the room.

All that she took in for the moment was that her spectator was an elderly man of slight build, dressed in rather shabby black clothes, and that one of his eyes seemed to be fixed on a spot in the centre of the room, while the other roved round restlessly, fastening first on one object, then on another.

Directly he perceived that she was aware of his presence he began to nod his head and smile, in a manner which Marion supposed was meant to be reassuring. Still continuing to bow and mouth and grin he gesticulated towards the front door, as if to convey that he desired admission. But he said never a word, though he could easily have been heard through the window. Marion thought it was just possible it might be Zambra himself, arrived before his time; or, if not, it might be a messenger from Mr. Oakley, or even Cuthbert's lawyer. At any rate, there was nothing alarming about the nodding, smiling figure, and it would be daylight for an hour or two; so Marion motioned to the front door, and went herself to open it.

No sooner was she confronted by her strange visitor than the cause of his silence was revealed. The lean-visaged man, with one wandering and one steadfast eye, was labouring under intense emotion. For some seconds, still bowing and grimacing, he appeared to be struggling for words which would not come; and when at last the skinny, yellow throat emitted a few husky tones, they quavered as though with suppressed tears. But it was what he said rather than the manner of saying it that astonished Marion.

"My dear niece! My poor murdered brother's child!" he croaked, opening his arms expectantly. "Ah, you do not know me, of course—even by reputation, I fear," he went on, when Marion hung back, far too self-possessed to respond to the invitation, "nevertheless I am your father's brother. Is it possible that he never mentioned me?"

"My poor father said but little about his family during the few days I knew him," said Marion. "He did not tell me that he had a brother."

"Poor dear Michael! and yet we played as boys together," murmured the visitor. "Yes, my dear, I am your Uncle Simon—the Reverend Simon Standridge, as known to the world—a humble servant of the Lord, and accounted a passable preacher, though a weak vessel. Let me hand you my credentials, dear niece. You cannot be too particular in your present sad position," he added, as though anxious to make excuses for her lack of enthusiasm.

He produced and handed to her a visiting card, on which was printed:—

THE REVEREND S. STANDRIDGE,
Norton Delaval Rectory,
Yorkshire.

Ready-witted girl as Marion was, she was too much of a woman to withstand the evidence of printer's ink. There was no longer a shadow of distrust in her mind, and though she did not up to the present feel particularly drawn to her relative, she felt that she could not do less than ask him into the house. On the threshold of the sitting-room, cocking his movable eye inquiringly, Uncle Sam ejaculated, "The scene of the—the lamentable occurrence?" and on receiving Marion's hushed affirmative, sank groaning into the armchair. It was sometime before he recovered himself, then he said:

"I knew nothing of it till I read it in the paper yesterday. You see papers don't reach my quiet parsonage till they are two or three days old. I did not even know that Michael was in England till I read of his death. I came away at once in the hope of being in time for the funeral—of being allowed to—ah! perform the last blessed rites, perhaps—but I found that the obsequies took place the day before yesterday. Inquiries led me to Mrs. Bonfield's, by whom I was told that you were here, so I came on to proffer you my feeble assistance."

"It is very good of you," said Marion, "but I do not think you can help me, unless you know who murdered my father?"

"Would that I did! Would that I did!" sighed the Reverend Simon Standridge. "But I can tell you something else," he added more briskly. "I can tell you who did not murder him, and that is the young fellow who is in custody on the charge. Of course, I only know what appeared in the papers, but if that is true his arrest was an outrage, my dear. Rural police can be stupid, I know, but I could not have believed them guilty of this egregious folly. Why, he is innocent on the face of it."

Whether wittingly or not, "Uncle Simon" had taken the straight cut to Marion's good will. He believed in Cuthbert. That was enough for Marion, and her heart warmed to the odd creature in the armchair. She never dared to wonder by what process he had come to the conclusion so strictly at variance with the evidence produced. She did not think it in the least strange that he had formed this friendly opinion about one whom he could never have seen; she only knew she would have hated him if he had believed in Cuthbert's guilt, strong proof against her lover though there was. But "Uncle Simon" declared him innocent, and Marion melted accordingly.

She got up and put another cup on the table, and pressed

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her visitor to join her at tea. Her invitation was gratefully, and even eagerly received, but just as she was about to fill the cup, her guest checked her with a request to half fill it only. At the same time he fished out from the tail pocket of his seedy black frockcoat a large flask, from which he plentifully diluted his tea with brown brandy, saying as he did so:

"I need not apologize, my dear, I am sure. I take this nasty stuff under medical advice—spasms, you know."

Marion would have forgiven him anything just then, so he took his "nasty stuff" and took it with a relish. He did not replace the flask in his pocket, but stood it on the mantelpiece not far from the brown tobacco jar. The spasms were of a recurrent nature, he explained.

During the conversation which followed, Uncle Simon dove-tailed his sympathetic offers of assistance with speculative surmises about the author of the crime, more especially with regard to the method adopted by the latter for carrying off the missing money. Though he so stoutly maintained his belief in Cuthbert's innocence, he seemed to have formed no definite notion as to who was the real murderer. One moment he suggested a tramp, only to alter his opinion in the next breath in favour of a London burglar. Notwithstanding these conjectures, he evinced very great interest in the hunt instituted by Inspector Dimmock throughout the premises, and he plied Marion with questions about the places which had and had not been searched.

She pointed out to him at last that, convinced as they both were that Cuthbert had no hand in the matter, there was no reason why they should seriously discuss the fruitless efforts of the police in that direction. The search was a wild-goose chase, foredoomed to failure, for the simple reason that there was nothing to be found. Whoever had planned the murder had doubtless also successfully planned to carry the plunder clear away. Marion very nearly alluded to the expected aid of the detective she had summoned, but she checked herself. Even the affability of her elderly relative should not prevail upon her to speak of Zambra's coming. All her hopes were centred in the latter now, and he should have a fair field to set to work in his own way, absolutely unknown to anyone.

Uncle Simon listened gravely, complimenting his "dear niece" on her superior wisdom, and made no more inconsistent references to possible hiding-places. He quite agreed that the question of search had only arisen because Cuthbert had come on a bicycle, and because it was impossible for him to have carried off such a weight of gold in that fashion.

"Silly of me to be wondering about my dear brother's stolen savings," he said. "Of course they were taken miles away that same night—probably in a cart."

It was about this time that Uncle Simon produced a briar-wood pipe, and after rummaging his pockets, apparently in vain, for the wherewithal to fill it, cast his eye suddenly on the tobacco jar in which Marion had found the envelope. Taking down the jar with a little cry of surprised relief, he plunged his hand among the contents and withdrew a modicum of the tobacco. Just then the eccentricity of his eyes was very noticeable. While his hand was in the jar his fixed eye never left Marion's face, though the other was busily following the action of his hands. At the sight of the black, coarse-cut cavendish, however, his expression changed to one of rueful disgust, and he replaced the jar without filling his pipe.

"Won't do for me, my dear," he said. "Poor Michael! Cut cavendish, you see. All very well for an old traveller, but too strong for a mild, old clergyman. Speaks well for the police that they didn't help themselves to this fine-flavoured stuff. I wouldn't mind laying a wager, though, that they rummaged the jar for missing keys—and things?"

Marion had very good reason for knowing that the police had not searched the jar, but she meant her policy of silence to apply doubly to the envelope, and she made no reply.

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The conversation was changed, but the eye remained fixed for quite a long while on Marion's face after this little interlude.

Nine o'clock came and Marion had long since lit the lamp and drawn the blind, yet Uncle Simon still sat on. She began to wonder when her visitor would go, for the nearest sleeping accommodation was at Reading, seven miles away; and as he had come on foot he would presumably have to walk the distance. Suddenly, after an extra cordial invitation to come and stay with him at his "humble Yorkshire parsonage," he rose to take his leave. But in the midst of his farewells he paused and clapped his hand to his stomach; then sank, groaning, into the chair, with every indication of intense pain.

"An attack," he murmured. "One of my worst attacks, I fear," and for some minutes he swayed to and fro, and writhed this way and that, greatly to Marion's alarm. At length he seemed to recover a little, but only to fall back in a state of collapse.

"I am afraid it is useless to attempt to move," he groaned. "When I am taken this way there is nothing for it but complete rest. But what shall I do? I shall be putting you to a sad convenience, I fear."

Marion was obliged to confess that she had no bed to offer him, but she could do no less than place the couch in the sitting-room at his disposal for the night. Even had she not been so well disposed towards him she could hardly have turned a suffering man—an elderly relative, too—out of doors at that time of night with a seven mile walk before him.

She apologized for the hardness of the horse-hair sofa but, such as it was, heartily invited him to make use of it.

Uncle Simon showed a good deal of sensitiveness on the subject of what he called his unfortunate intrusion, but in the end he gratefully accepted the arrangement. How he longed for the time to come when he should be able to repay his dear niece's kindness by entertaining her in his beloved home among the Yorkshire wolds.

So it was when Marion went up to bed at eleven o'clock she left her guest below. He was already stretched on the couch and snoring soundly when she quitted the room.

CHAPTER X.

Zambra the Detective.

The night passed quietly at Kennett's Cross with two trifling exceptions.

Marion had been asleep for a couple of hours when she was awakened by a sound as of the banging of a distant door. The noise which woke her, though loud, was of so brief a duration that it had passed away before she was sufficiently aroused to locate its origin, but her impression was that the sound came from the end of the passage opposite her bedroom.

There was a good deal of wind blowing, and Marion attributed the disturbance, if she had not dreamt it, to a sudden gust striking the draughty old house, and slamming the door of one of the empty rooms.

After listening in vain for a repetition of the sound, she fell asleep again, to be awakened, however, towards the small hours of the morning by distinct footsteps in the sitting-room below. Fearing that her visitor might have been taken ill again, and in need of assistance, she unlocked her bedroom door and opened it a little way.

The dawn was just beginning to break outside, but in the house all was as yet in darkness, save that a streak of yellow light on the stairs showed that the door of the sitting-room was open, and that the lamp was burning there. The footsteps had ceased.

Marion called down, "Are you ill? Can I do anything for you?"

The only answer she got was the sudden cessation of the lamplight, suggesting that the sitting-room door had either been closed very quietly or that the lamp had been extinguished. After waiting fully a minute she called down again, louder this time, with the result that the door below was rather noisily opened, the light reappeared, and Uncle Simon's voice was heard croaking:

"Is that you, my dear?"

"I heard you moving about," Marion said; "are you still unwell?"

"Better, much better, dear niece, thank you," came the reply, "only too restless to sleep much. But there is no need for alarm. I beg of you not to disturb yourself."

Marion went back to bed relieved.

"I suppose he did not hear me call the first time, though his door was certainly open then," she said to herself. "He must have opened it to get more air, and I expect I chanced to hear him when he went to close it in the chill of the morning."

When the two met later, Uncle Simon professed himself restored to health, and, after sharing Marion's frugal breakfast, expressed his intention of taking his departure for the present. He had business which would detain him in London for some little time, he said, but he would certainly take an early opportunity of running down to see his dear niece again, and perhaps he would be able to help her in clearing that poor persecuted young man's character—who could tell? Mrs. Bonfield had told him of her difference with Marion and the cause of it, and he assured his dear niece once more that Mr. Blakesly's cause was his cause—that he would never rest till he was at liberty.

Marion did not attempt to restrain his departure, for her mind was full of her coming interview with the detective, and she had not formed a very high opinion of the assistance proffered so freely by her new relative. She was quite sure he meant well—if he had not been so peculiar in appearance, his staunch belief in Cuthbert might have induced her to call him "a dear old thing"—but to the girl's shrewd common sense, only clouded in one particular, there seemed to be a little too much gush about Uncle Simon. She took leave of him at the garden gate, and he had gone some little way along the lane towards the high road when he called to her.

"By the way, if you want to communicate with me, don't write to Yorkshire. My housekeeper is instructed not to forward letters. I will send you an address in London to which to write in a day or two when I get settled."

Marion nodded and stood looking after the shabby, black-coated figure till it disappeared round a bend in the lane.

The morning was pleasant and spring-like, with the scent of distant hayfields in the air, and she delayed her return to the house to stroll for a while in the tangled wilderness that had once been a front garden. Uncle Simon had been gone, perhaps ten minutes when, without any warning, she became aware that a man was standing at the gate watching her.

The stranger was dressed in a well-cut suit of quiet tweeds, and he wore a hard felt hat. He was slightly over the middle height, and when he removed his hat Marion was struck by the wonderful resemblance of his features to the portraits of the first Napoleon. The temples covered with long, smooth, straight hair, the cheeks hollow up to the inner angle of the eye, the projecting cheek bones, the massive jaw, the sinuous mobile lips pressed together as if in attention, the large, clear eyes deeply sunk under the broad, arched brows, the oblique look as penetrating as a rapier, the frown of determined will—all combined to counterfeit the popular conception of the great Emperor.

But, even while Marion looked, the likeness vanished, for the stranger smiled as he met her inquiring glance, and the whole expression of his face differed at once from that of his great prototype. The face remained shrewd and practical, but it showed itself capable of kindliness and even sympathy, and Marion was glad, because she rightly divined that this was Zambra, the detective.

"I think I have the pleasure of addressing Miss Stand-

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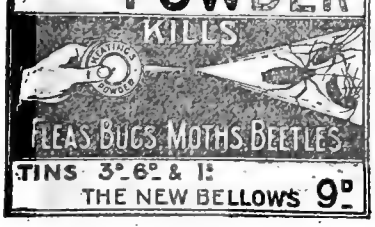

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ridge," he said, coming through the gate to meet her. "I am here in consequence of your telegram; let me produce it as a credential," and he put the form into her hand.

Marion just glanced at it and gave it back. "I am so pleased that you have come," she said. "We had better go into the house for our talk, had we not? Very few people come along the lane, but you might not like to run the chance of being seen."

"In the house by all means," said Zambra; "but stay a moment. There has been a great trampling here recently. Surely, the police did not allow the place to be overrun with sightseers?"

"I heard there was a great crowd on the day of the inquest which was held there," said Marion.

"The old story!" exclaimed Zambra. "They have got enough evidence to justify an arrest, and so they are cocksure that the man they have arrested is the man, and that no further precaution need be taken. Has it rained in this district lately?"

"There was a heavy shower on Saturday morning—the day of the discovery," replied Marion.

"Ah!" said Zambra, "that shower may have its advantages as well as its drawbacks. It may even override the stupidity of the police in permitting the mob to spoil the ground, but stupidity is none the less annoying because harmless. Perhaps I had better settle this before we go indoors, for it is really important. Allow me one moment."

And before Marion fully understood his intention he had left her side to step quickly to the corner of the house on the inhabited sitting-room side. Between the house and the path running round it, there was a narrow space of soil about two feet wide that had once been a flower border, but was now overgrown with weeds. To this border, just at the angle of the house, Zambra paid the closest attention, scrutinizing the earth and examining with deft fingers the tendrils of the twining convolvulus that grew there. He then went to the other front corner of the house, beyond the empty lumber-room, and repeated the process still more carefully, but Marion thought, judging from the contraction of his brows, without seeing what he expected.

He was on his way to rejoin her when his eye fastened on the laurel bush that grew between the corner of the house and the lumber-room window.

"This is all in the day's work. You will not mind waiting, Miss Standridge," he said, and again he was stooping and peering this time under and among the branches of the ragged evergreen.

Suddenly he went down upon his knees, and, taking out a magnifying-glass, held it inch by inch over every foot of the ground between the shrub and the house. Then he rose, and in answer to Marion's look of expectation, said:

"Yes, I have seen what I expected—what I hoped—to see! but it will be best to refer to it in its proper place. I am at your service."

He followed her into the sitting-room, his eyes noting every little detail as they passed through the bare, unfurnished hall.

"This is the room where my father was found," said Marion. "I am compelled to occupy it for the present, because it is the only apartment habitable on the ground floor."

Zambra had sat up late the previous night reading all the published reports of the case, and he did not attempt to repress his admiration for the brave girl who had taken up her abode amid such terrible associations to serve her lover's cause.

"Your motive for living here alone must be a very strong one," he replied. "As there must be no half-confidences between us, you will pardon my saying that I have guessed it already. Mr. Blakesly was very unnecessarily made to refer to you at the inquest."

"The immediate cause of my coming here was a quarrel about this case with the lady who has had the care of me from childhood—a quarrel which I greatly regret," said Marion. "But in one way I was glad of the opportunity, because I thought that I might be of more use here. I hardly know what to think now. It is quite true that I—that I believe in Mr. Blakesly's innocence, and—and have set myself to prove it," she added, faltering a little for the first time at the admission; "but I have made a discovery which seems more likely to do him harm than good."

As she spoke she handed Zambra the blood-stained envelope which she had found in the tobacco jar, and explained the circumstances of its discovery.

"It is undoubtedly the envelope of the letter which invited Mr. Blakesly to come out here on the night of the murder, and so far corroborates his story," she continued; "but I dared not produce it with that dreadful stain."

Zambra did not reply at once. He had walked over to the window, and was scrutinizing the envelope closely from every possible point of view. Then, flattening it out against the glass, he had recourse to his lens again, and subjected the crumpled paper to the most minute examination. Marion watched patiently, but it was not until he had been thus engaged fully five minutes that he turned to her, and throwing the envelope on the table said very quietly:

"Miss Standridge, I am not in the habit of indulging in cheap cant, so you may believe me when I say that Providence is with us. In the hands of the police that envelope would have hanged Mr. Blakesly; in my hands I have hopes that it will not only save him, but lead us to the actual murderer. Curious, too," he added with a smile, "that we should be indebted for this prospect to the laxity of the police in not conducting a thorough search. I suppose each was afraid the other would think he was helping himself, and fought shy of the tobacco jar accordingly."

"Thank Heaven I sent for you!" exclaimed Marion. "This is good news indeed. But tell me whom you suspect."

"No one at present," replied Zambra. "I only know that the prisoner had no hand in this crime—more than that, that he is himself a victim, and I will tell you why. But one question first. You recognise the address on the envelope as being in your father's writing?"

"Oh, yes," said Marion, "I recognised it at once. I had several notes from my father during the week after he found me. Besides, you see the postmark and date tally."

"Exactly," said Zambra; "and now, before we go any further on the track of the right man, I will tell you why I have come to the conclusion that Mr. Blakesly is the wrong one. I formed a rough theory last Tuesday morning on reading the account of the inquest—long before I knew I was to be connected with the case. I will say at once that what influenced me was the nature of Mr. Cuthbert Blakesly's defence. The cat story was simply too preposterous not to be true. I mean that a criminal capable of planning such a subtle crime would have planned a more probable excuse for the condition of his clothes and his bicycle than the fantastic reason which this unfortunate young gentleman has given. Forty hours elapsed between his arrest and the inquest, and it is an insult to any intelligent person—cornered as Mr. Blakesly would have been had he been guilty—to suppose that in that interval, in the seclusion of a police cell, he could not have devised a better tale than that."

(To be continued.)

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THE SCIENCE OF SUCCESS

Reader, have you ever stopped to consider why some persons are so successful; why everything they touch seems to turn to gold; why they acquire wealth, position, power and influence without any seemingly great effort on their part? Such persons surround themselves with friends, are honored and respected in their communities; are sought after in society, and gain prominence and distinction without apparently trying. Have you ever considered these things? Do you know why?

WHAT BRINGS SUCCESS

Not hard work, for the poor work harder than the rich. Not birth, because many of our successful men are of lowly parentage. Not luck, for many a lucky man dies friendless and poor. We will tell you why. The secret of success in life is personal influence—the ability to make others think as you do; to win their confidence and friendship and get them to help you. There is a secret power by which you can wield an irresistible personal influence; by which you may overcome all obstacles, charm and fascinate whom you will; by which you may cure every known disease and bad habit without the aid of drugs, medicines or the surgeon's knife. It is called personal Magnetism or Hypnotism. It is the basis of success in every business and calling.

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It is a God-given power that is the heritage of the poor as well as the rich. It is truly the wonder science of the age. Consider what it means to be able to convince a man that your goods are the best on the market, that your services are invaluable to him, that you are offering to him a good investment, that he needs what you have to sell, that your opinion is correct, that he should act upon your advice, and a thousand other things of this kind. Consider what an advantage such a power would give you. If you wish to secure a good paying position, obtain an increase in salary, or add to your present income in any way, a knowledge of hypnotism will prove invaluable. In hundreds of instances it has been the turning point in the lives of people who were ready to give up in despair—for whom the future seemed to have no hope.

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THE EDITOR'S PAGE.

Turn to the first page. You will there observe that an important change has been made in *Short Stories*. Every week, from to-day on, a complete novel will be comprised in each number.

For this feature I have been fortunate enough to secure some of the ablest and most popular writers of the day. Altogether, we may say that *Short Stories* now provides by far the best pennyworth of good, wholesome fiction to be obtained. Tell your friends about the new feature. Also kindly write in and tell me what you think of it.

The brilliant series of stories now drawing to a conclusion, entitled, "A Keeper of Secrets" has won for Mr. Norman Silver many additional thousands of admirers. Those who have read the series, and who remember the same author's entrancing novels, "Hate, the Destroyer," and "A Daughter of Mystery," will welcome with delight the information that Norman Silver is just now putting the finishing touches to a brand new novel, written especially for *Short Stories*. This story, the title of which is at present a secret so profound that even Mr. Pontifex himself would have been puzzled to discover it, will run in serial form through these pages. Further particulars will be announced in due time.

"E. E. E."—The flower perfume trade has reached immense proportions in Europe. In the vicinity of Nice alone the value of the product of flowers for perfume and for seed-raising for large wholesale establishments reaches the equal of about £400,000 a year. The larger portion goes for distilling perfumes, although much attention is given to raising specialities in the flower line for seedsmen. The flowers raised consist chiefly of orange flowers, rose petals, jasmines, peppermint, and lavender. Violets are also largely raised for perfumery purposes.

"Sandy" asks me the question, "What does a lion weigh?"

Ask that question of any acquaintance and see what he will say. Those who know the look of the king of beasts best, and how small his lithe body really is, will probably come furthest from the truth. About 300 to 350 pounds is a usual estimate. But this is below the mark. A full-grown lion will tip the scale at no less than 500 pounds. Five hundred and forty pounds is the record for an African lion. His bone is solid and heavy as ivory.

The tiger runs the lion very close. A Bengal tiger, killed two years ago by an English officer, scaled 520 pounds. A tiger of this size has, however, considerably greater muscular strength than the biggest lion. Few people know that a grizzly bear can give points to any other carnivorous animal in point of strength. A grizzly bear weighing just four hundredweight has been watched carrying a heifer of more than two-thirds its own weight for two miles up the most steep and rugged mountain-side, and this without pausing for one instant for rest. The grizzly bear is the largest and most powerful of all the bear tribe, but his cousin, the cinnamon bear, runs him very close, and the big white Polar bear, though not really so dangerous a customer, is capable of performing the most extraordinary feats of strength. A Polar bear has been seen to move with his paws a boulder six men had with difficulty put in position to guard a store of provisions.

Here is a letter from a lady on the subject of beards, which at the present time seem to be going out of fashion among men. Perhaps somebody has something to say on the other side of the question:

"A man without a beard looks like a house without blinds, a horse without a mane, or any other incomplete affair. It is not uncommon for the throat and eye disease to punish the man who shaves, not to mention the tears and wry faces he knows, in consequence of resisting beard or dull razor.

"Only consider all that a man will go through in order to deprive himself of protection and his greatest dignity and beauty—as not infrequently a full, well-cared-for beard is. My husband never shaves. He never did shave. And permit me to tell you that the man who never shaves has a soft beard, silky as the hair of the head, and instead of growing down over the mouth as the beard does being cut till it becomes as stiff as a broom, it inclines to the right and left.

"Akin to shaving—a barbarism which should be hunted from the world—is the custom of cutting the hair so close that the scalp shines through. It is injurious as well as disfiguring. The hair is a conductor of electricity to the brain, and it should never be less than two inches in length. Unless the facts in the case are taught in the schools, so that boys are warned, in a few generations more we shall have a general softening of the brain among our masculine population. There is more than one sign of the near danger. Give us back the beard, the majestic, flowing beard, and spare us the hairless head until age renders it natural and reverend."

TO CONTRIBUTORS.

I am open to consider original stories of any length from 1,500 to 4,000 words. The character of stories required may be best ascertained by a careful reading of the contents of the paper. All MSS. are dealt with promptly, and every effort is made to return rejected stories which are accompanied by stamped addressed envelopes. At the same time, I cannot hold myself responsible for MSS. accidentally lost. Communications of this kind should be addressed The Editor, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, Strand, W.C.

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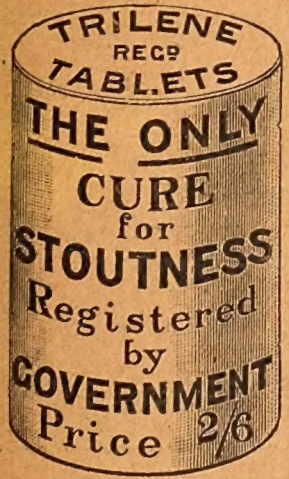

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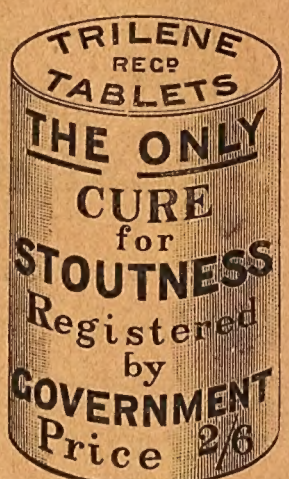

SAMPLES OF TESTIMONIALS.

"87 Alexandra Road, Norwich, October 19th, 1896.

"Gentlemen,—In reference to Trilene Tablets, I may say that my wife found the greatest possible benefit from the use of them; their action was rapid, and exceeded our utmost expectations, as they were also most beneficial to the respiratory organs. My wife was many years growing so stout, but although the disease was, I consider chronic, the Tablets soon reduced the same completely. You have our united thanks, and if I can do anything to promote your interests I will freely use my utmost endeavours to do so.

"Yours faithfully, J. R. CANHAM."

MRS. DARNLEY SMITH, Landscove Vicarage, Ashburton, writes: "Trilene Tablets have reduced my weight very much. I am so much lighter in every way, and better in health."

COUNTESS SECKENDORFF, of Berlin, writes: "The Tablets greatly benefited me personally, and I am recommending them to friends."

MISS CHATTERTON, 7 Salisbury Villas, Banstead, Surrey, says: "I weighed 12st. 8lb., but am now 11st. and getting much better."

Nurse CROUCHER, at Mrs. Bennett's, 14 Buckleigh Road, Streatham, says: "I lost 9lb. from the box I took."

"77 Hindhill Street, Heywood, February 5th, 1898.

"Gentlemen,—I have not quite finished the box of Tablets and am 2lb. lighter. The change is great, and several friends are beginning the treatment, which not only reduces fat but strengthens rheumatic joints—such has been the case with me. "Yours sincerely, M. A. HEYWOOD."

MRS. D. BURTON, of Silverleigh, Tunbridge, writes: "I am very pleased with difference in size, my friends all telling me how much thinner I am getting."

Miss NORTHLEDGE, The Laurels, Risebolme Road, Lincoln, says: "The Tablets reduced me 1st., so that I am cured."

West Cornforth, Ferryhill.

MR. WM. USHER says: "A sister of mine, who was 17st., was greatly reduced by your Tablets to 15st."

Extract from *The Lady*, September 3rd, 1896: "Many stout persons have suffered untold agonies in unavailing efforts to reduce their bulk, either by means of severe dieting, or by taking more or less deleterious drugs; but all these pains would have been saved if they had only invested in a box of the wonderful Trilene Tablets which are quite harmless, containing neither mercury, arsenic, nor any other mineral poison, and which are an unfailing cure for obesity."

MRS. T. BOSTON, Cambridge Villas, Clifford Street, South Wigston, says: "I congratulate you on your wonderful Tablets. My weight at first starting them was 11st. 7lb., and I now weigh 9st. 11lb."

Mr. MCLEOD, 44, Calside, Paisley, writes: "I have been cured. If you want to know my weight now, it is 10st.; reduced 1st. 8lb., and I am quite content."

A. M. PRATT of Ongar House, Ongar, says: "My weight is so much reduced it is unnecessary to take more. The reduction of weight was from 12st. 6lb. to 10st. 4lb."

MRS. H. COX, 28 Watnall Road, Hucknall Torkard, writes: "The box of Tablets has reduced my weight 1½ stones."

MR. WALKER, 236 London Road, Hazelgrove, Stockport, says: "I have used one box and am 14lb. lighter. Send another soon as possible."

Col.-Sergt. WHITTLE, of East Lancashire Regt., Burnley, Lancs, says: "A man in our regiment in 1891 lost several stone from taking your Tablets."

MRS E. ALEXANDER, 102 Dixon Street, New Swindon, says: "They have reduced me quite 2 stone, and I am now quite cured."

Mrs. W. A. RADFORD, of High Street, New Brinsley, Eastwood, writes: "Before taking Tablets I was 46 inches round waist, now I am 32 inches. I hope soon to be 23. I could hardly move or get up, now I get about easily. Please use this as you wish."

Countess FURSTENBERG, of Germany, writes: "They act speedily and well."

The Princess LIECHTENSTEIN writes from Landsberg, Austria: "Pray send me your excellent Tablets."

Mrs. WEAVER, of Greenpits Villa, Ross, Hereford, writes "I am reduced from 13st. 8lb. to 11st. You may use this if you like."

MRS. CROSSLEY, of Rose Hill, Torver, nr. Coniston, says: "There is a very decided diminution of fat. I am delighted, and cannot speak too highly in praise of Tablets. My heart is better, and I can breathe so much easier. You may refer to me as often as you like."

Lady C. CONRAD writes from Wiesbaden: "I am very pleased with your Tablets."

Mrs. TAYLOR-ROBINSON, of Tweed Green House, Whalley Range, Manchester, says: "I feel so much lighter and better since taking your Tablets, and am so much thinner that I hardly recognise myself."

Miss A. LONG, of 9 South Parade, Waterford, writes: "Your Tablets have reduced me 14lb."

Miss A. DAWSON, 62 Orchard Street, Weston-super-Mare, says: "Glad to say the Tablets have sufficiently reduced me. I shall always recommend them."

Miss F. L. BALL, 47 Chesterfield Road, St. Andrews, Bristol, writes: "I am quite cured through your Tablets. They improve the figure, and greatly relieve shortness of breath."

Miss PATIENT, of Woodberry, Theydon Bois: "Feel great benefit from Tablets. I have lost 2 st., and am sufficiently reduced."

Mrs. DREW, of 1 Bellevue Gardens, The Nursery, Devizes, writes: "I took Tablets some years ago; they soon reduced me and I have not got stout since. Send me a box for my mother."

THE TRILENE ASSOCIATION, 66 FINSBURY PAVEMENT, LONDON.

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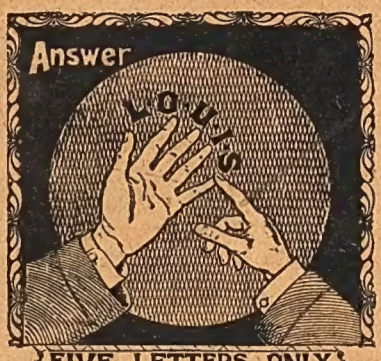

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